THE SKULL MAN

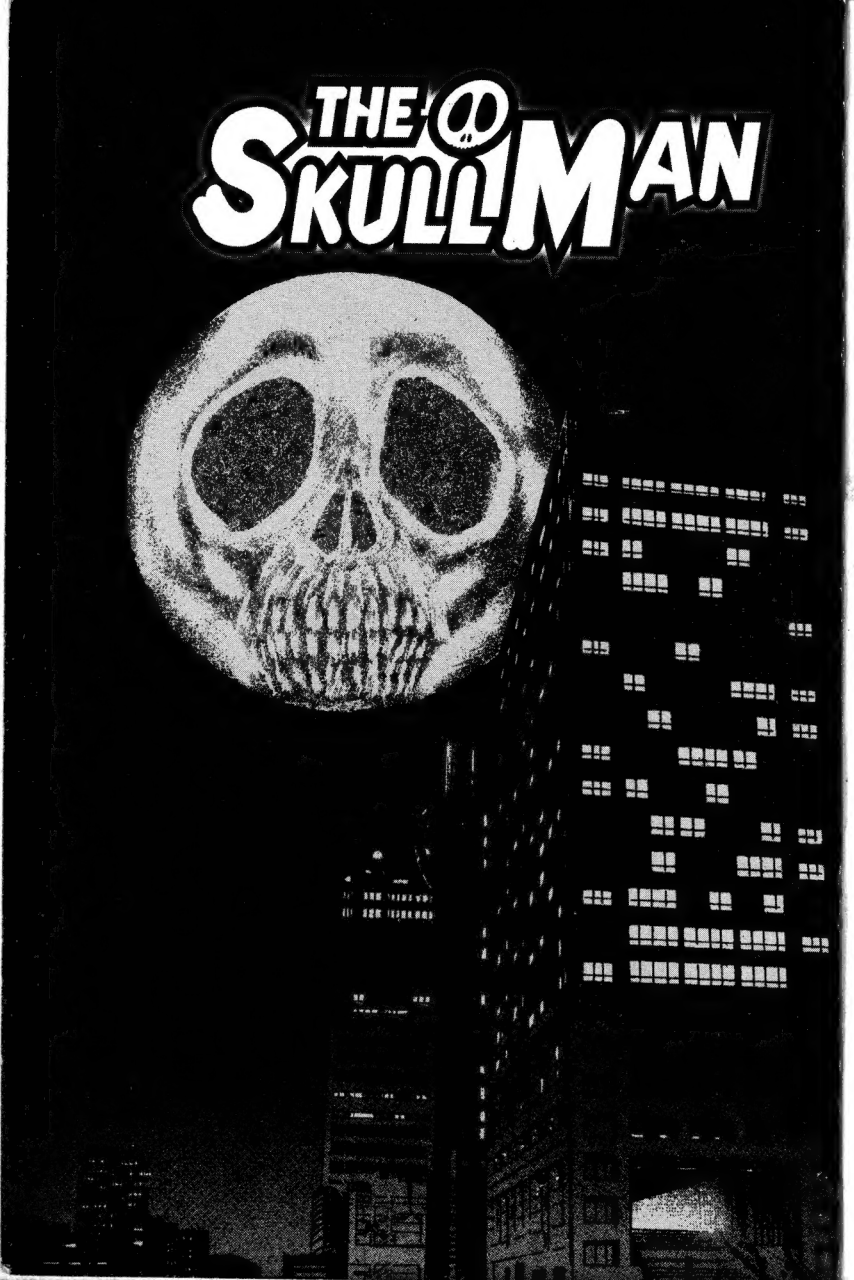
1

Kazuhiko Shimamoto
Shotaro Ishinomori

TOKYOPOP

THE SKULL MAN

They took his family, they took his face, they took his soul... Now the Skull Man is going to take his revenge. Resurrected from the land of the dead, the Skull Man is hunting down the men responsible for destroying his life and nothing will stand in his way. In an unjust world, the Skull Man will use any means necessary to get the vengeance he seeks! Experience the final story by manga legend Shotaro Ishinomori, creator of *Masked Rider* and *Cyborg 009*.


THE SKULL MAN

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Introduction

To American fans of Japanese popular culture, the leading Japanese cartoonists are those whose work has been most prominently adapted into animation; especially the anime imported into America. Such names as Osamu Tezuka, Go Nagai, Leiji Matsumoto, Rumiko Takahashi, and Katsuhiro Otomo lead this list.

Shotaro Ishinomori may not be on this list, but he should be.

In Japan where Tezuka was known as manga no kamisama, the God of Comics, Ishinomori was next in line as manga no oosama, the King of Comics. A brief summary might give the false impression that Ishinomori was just following Tezuka: he was born ten years after Tezuka, he became a manga artist ten years after Tezuka did, he died at the same age as Tezuka. They were friends (and competitors) from the beginning of Ishinomori's career, which led to his early reputation as "Tezuka's protege."

But Ishinomori was very much more than an imitation Tezuka. If Americans are not as familiar with his name, it is because he struck out into areas away from the anime that made other Japanese cartoonists so well-known. In the 1970s Ishinomori created numerous live-action TV children's science-fiction/fantasy hits such as ***The Masked Rider*** and ***The Five Rangers***; the prototypes that led to the ***Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers***. In the 1980s he created the new genre of "information comics," notably with ***Cartoon Introduction to the Japanese Economy***, serialized in the Japanese equivalent of the ***Wall Street Journal***, which became a surprise best-seller (published in the U.S. as ***Japan, Inc.*** by the University of California Press). He pioneered the Japanese cartoon-production-shop system, incorporating in 1968 as Ishimori Production Co. and hiring enough assistants to produce, at its peak, over 500 pages of manga per month in his art style.

But Ishinomori never forgot his roots as a creator of boys' adventure comics like ***Cyborg 009*** -- and ***Skull Man***.

He was born Shotaro Onodera on January 25, 1938 in Miyagi Prefecture. He was 8 or 9 when Japan's modern comic books first appeared. He began submitting his own amateur comics to ***Manga Shonen (Boys' Comics)*** magazine when he was 12 years old. He was 16 and in high school when his first story, ***Second-Class Angel***, was published in the December 1954 ***Manga Shonen***.

During the 1980s he continued to produce ***Cyborg 009*** and some adventure comics, but his main interest shifted to more sophisticiated stories for mature readers. His ***Japan, Inc.*** was one of the hallmarks of this period. In 1984 he began ***Hotel***, an adult manga serial about the lives and careers of the management and staff of the luxury Hotel Platon. Both won him more awards in 1988. In 1990 ***Hotel*** became an adult live-action TV soap opera, more comparable to ***Dallas*** or ***The Mary Tyler Moore Show*** than to his old rubber-suit superhero programs. It was in 1986, on the 30th anniversary of the beginning of his career, that he changed his name for the final time to Ishinomori.

Ishinomori became an elder statesman of the manga industry in the 1990s. He was chosen manager of the Japanese Comics Writers Association, and in 1995 he appeared as Honorary Chairman of the new Medialand center which had over 90,000 attendees at its grand opening. But Ishinomori was actually invalided with heart problems from most of 1992 on, directing his manga factory from his bedside for his last six years. He died of a heart attack three days after his sixtieth birthday, on January 28, 1998.

One of his final projects was a completion of his ***Skull Man*** from 1970. ***Skull Man*** was actually an aborted version of what evolved into the ***Masked Rider*** (***Kamen Rider***) TV series. Ishinomori wrote and drew a 100-page ***Skull Man*** story to start the series, but the TV network wanted so many changes that he had to create a whole new ***Masked Rider*** manga instead. ***Skull Man*** was published as a stand-alone story in the January 11, 1971 issue of ***Shonen*** (***Boys***) magazine; the ***Masked Rider*** manga did not begin publication until June 1, 1972. ***Masked Rider*** debuted on TV on April 3, 1971, and was so popular that it and its sequels were TV hits throughout the 1970s and 1980s. But in many respects Ishinomori preferred his original concepts for ***Skull Man***. Shortly before his death, he collaborated with his young protege Kazuhiko Shimamoto to finally launch the ***Skull Man*** manga as he had wanted it.

Fred Patten

In 1956 he graduated from high school. He moved to Tokyo, where Osamu Tezuka had set up his studio in 1954, and became Tezuka's art assistant on his ***Alakazam the Great*** manga serial. (This is why his early art style was said to look so much like Tezuka's.) It was when he struck out on his own in 1959 that he took his first pseudonym, Ishimori, to inaugurate his "new life".

Ishinomori's first manga to gain him a reputation was ***The Ghost Ship***, 1960; filmed as a theatrical animated feature in 1969. During the 1960s he poured out dozens if not hundreds of science-fiction manga stories.

But these were incidental to his first mega-hit, ***Cyborg 009***. Begun in 1963 almost simultaneously with Marvel's similar ***The X-Men***, this superhero team saga is arguably the foundation of two of Japan's most popular manga, anime and TV science-fiction stereotypes (many also created by Ishinomori): the team of costumed and color-coded superheroes (***Robin's Rainbow Warriors***, ***The Five Rangers***, and all other TV "men in rubber suits" heroes leading up to ***The Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers***), and the reluctant heroes who have super powers forced upon them at the cost of their humanity (***Casshan, The Guyver***).

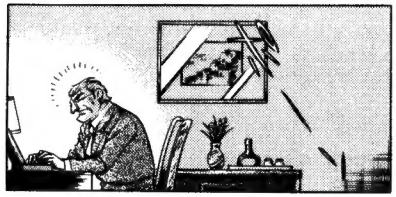
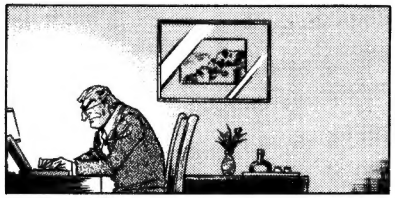
The popularity of ***Cyborg 009*** was instantaneous. It won Ishinomori his first award, the 7th Kodansha Manga Award, in 1966. Toei Animation rushed two theatrical animated features out in 1966 and 1967, followed by a ***Cyborg 009*** black-&-white TV animated series in 1968. A second, color TV series appeared in 1979 to 1980. A third theatrical feature, ***Cyborg 009: Legend of the Super Galaxy***, was released in December 1980 to celebrate Ishinomori's 25th anniversary as a manga artist.

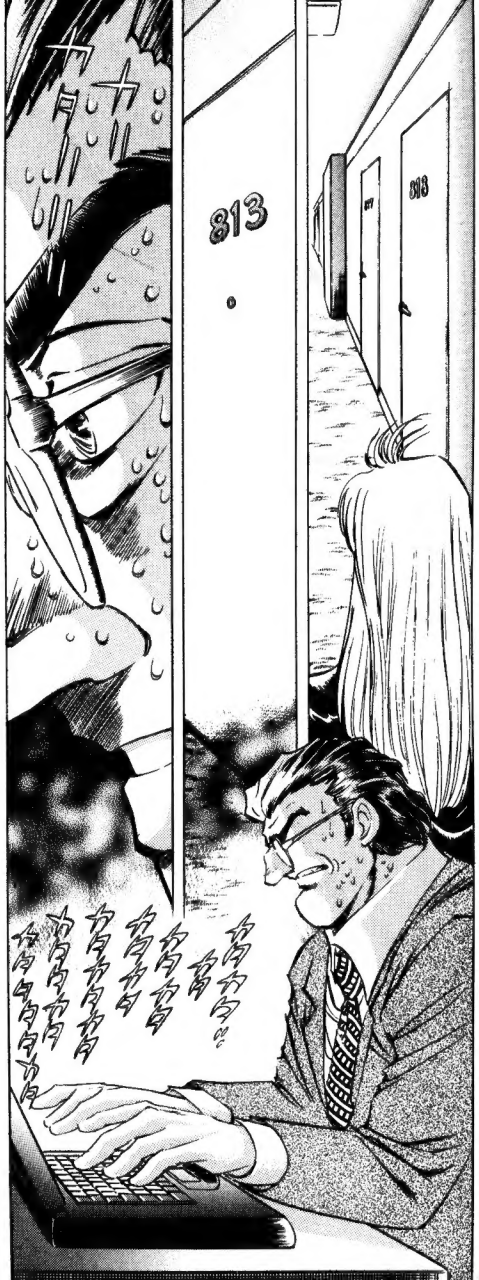
During the 1970s Ishimori Pro concentrated upon creating story ideas for TV series, then drawing them as manga if they were bought. It was at this point that Ishinomori began to specialize in live-action juvenile TV programs. Between 1966 and 1982 there were eleven TV animated series and six animated features based on his stories; but there were thirty live-action TV series from 1972 to 1982 alone. From July 1972 to December 1977 there were always at least two and sometimes as many as four Ishinomori live-action TV programs in first-run broadcast every week. These ranged from the serious (or as serious as the rubber-suit "monster of the week" TV programs ever got) like ***The Masked Rider*** and ***Kikaider the Artificial Man***, to the slapstick-silly like ***The Five Rangers*** and ***Li'l Robot***.

Vol. 1
PROLOGUE

WHEN THEIR COVER GETS BLOWN, THEY SCAPEGOAT A SUBORDINATE AND DRIVE HIM TO COMMIT SUICIDE.
FEDERAL TAX DOLLARS UNDER THE COVER OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISE.
A CORRUPT POLITICIAN TEAMS UP WITH A BUREAUCRAT TO MISAPPROPRIATE
DOES A STORY LIKE THAT INTEREST YOU?
ALL IN THE NAME OF MONEY AND POWER.
IF ANY OF THEIR PEOPLE THREATEN TO RAT THEM OUT, THEY HAVE THEM KILLED.

おおっ、カロ!
TEIO PLAZA HOTEL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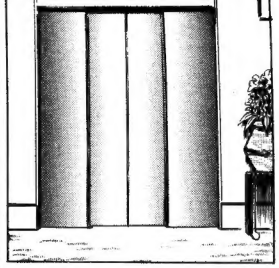
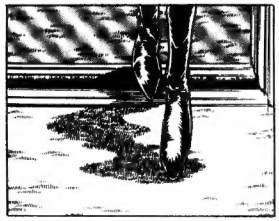
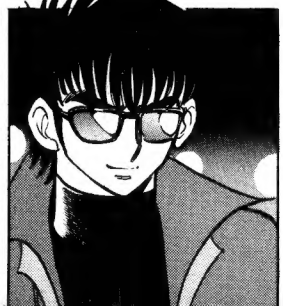
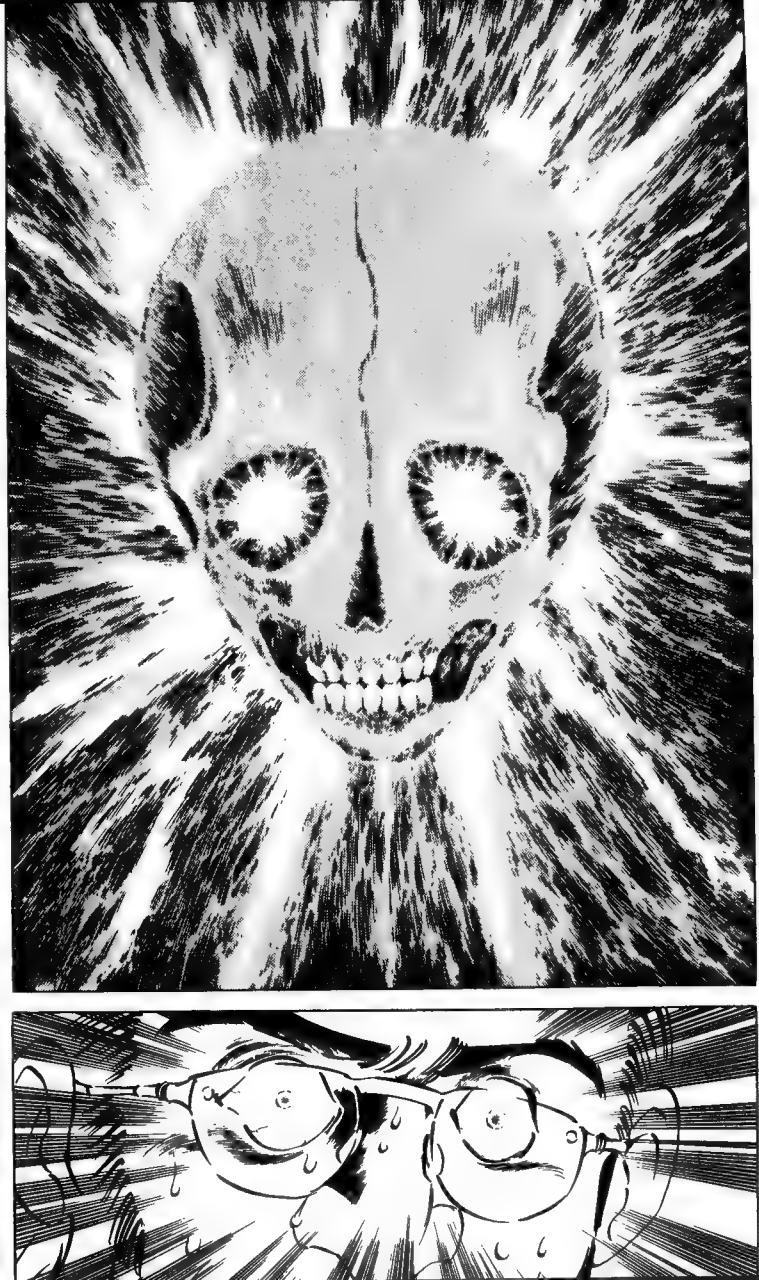
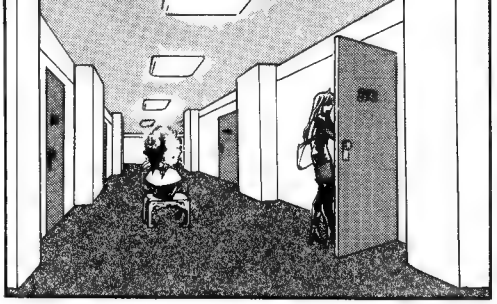




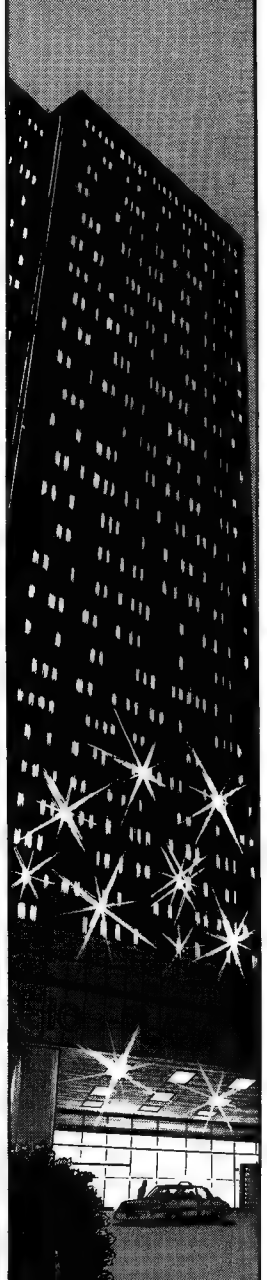




BY THEN, IT'S TOO LATE TO TURN BACK.
BUT BE CAREFUL. EVEN THE GATEKEEPERS OF HELL SOMETIMES FORGET THEY'RE IN HELL, TOO.

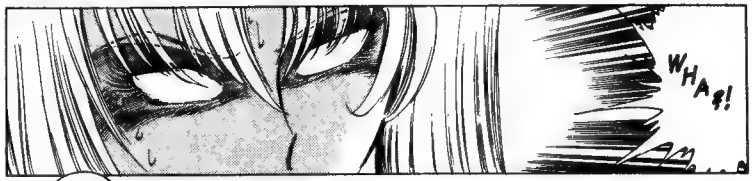


LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE CONCLUDED YOUR BUSINESS.
HEH HEH.
HI AGAIN.



YOU NEED TO WORK OUT MORE, HONEY!
YOU'RE JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH.

SORRY.
IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK ON ME!


WHAT!

HEH HEH.

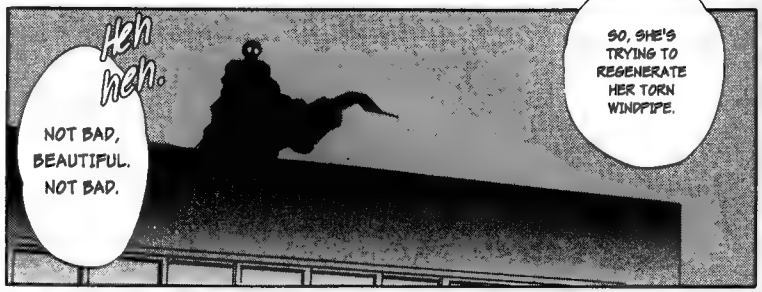
AM 10:00 ~ PM 12:00
Escort Service
1.500

WHAT?
?!
OH MY
GOD!
YOU'RE
ONE, TOO!!
HEH HEH...
HOW MANY TIMES ARE YOU GOING TO KILL ME?
...ARE YOU?
WHO...
PONY UP.

EEIIYAAAHHHHHHH

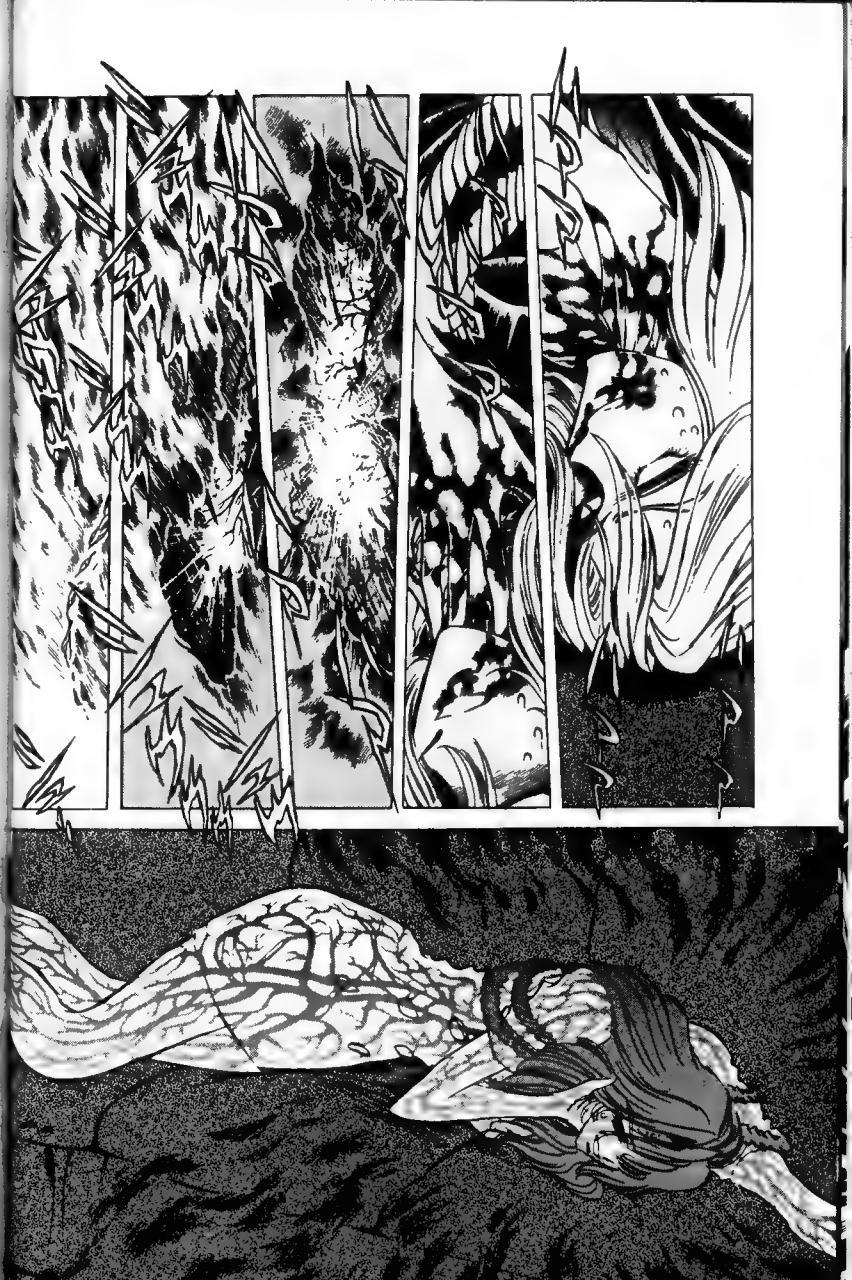
.....
UNH...
WHO...
ARE...
YOU?
UNH
UH...
?!
...

Vol. 2 ミッドナイト・スパイダー MIDNIGHT SPIDER


Heh heh.
NOT BAD, BEAUTIFUL. NOT BAD.
SO, SHE'S TRYING TO REGENERATE HER TORN WINDPIPE.

CAN'T KEEP HER IN THE KITCHEN.
A FINE EXAMPLE OF A MODERN, INDEPENDENT WOMAN.

THEY'RE KEEPERS.
I CAN APPRECIATE GIRLS LIKE THAT.



DON'T BOTHER.

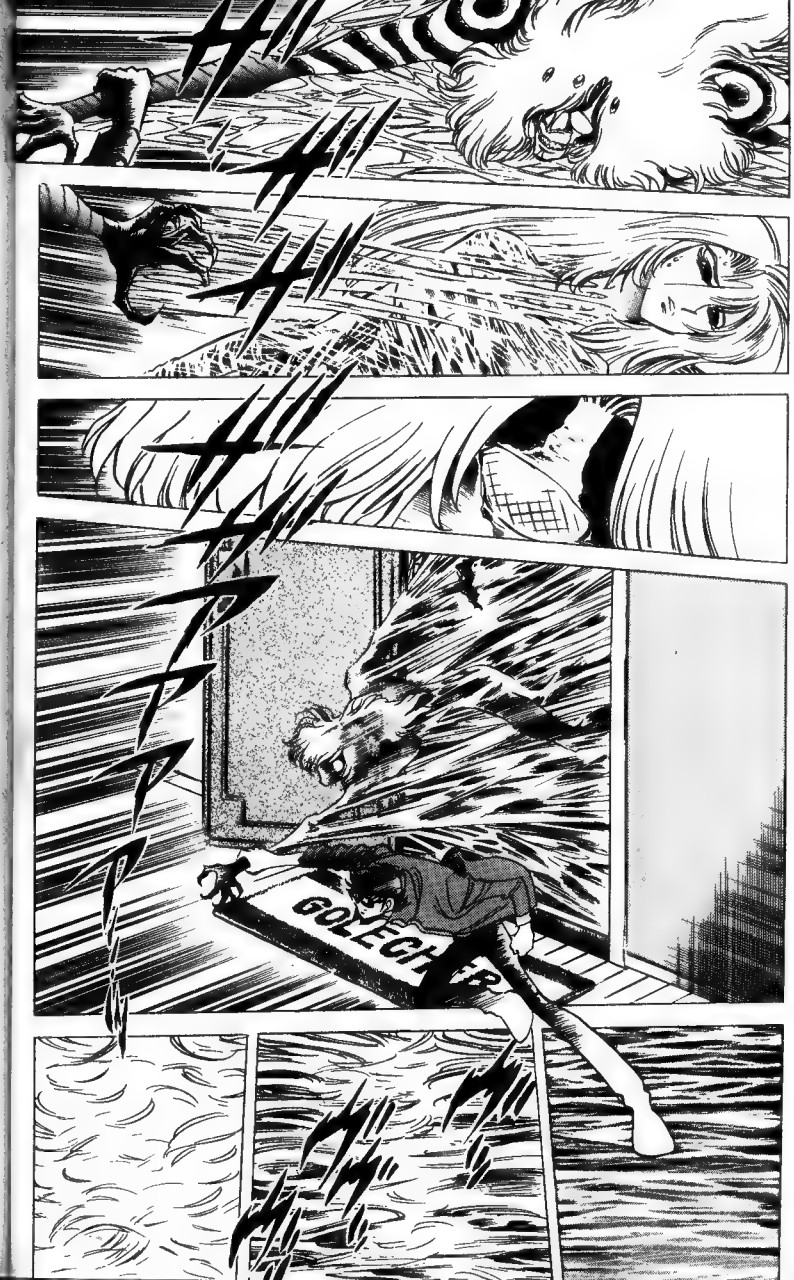
WHAT...?
THE WATER...
IT'S CLINGING TO MY BODY?!

I'VE MIXED MY WEB FLUID WITH YOUR BATHWATER.
YOU CAN'T MOVE.

I HAVE TO TIE UP ALL THE LOOSE ENDS. MAKE SURE THEY DON'T SLIP AWAY.
HUH?

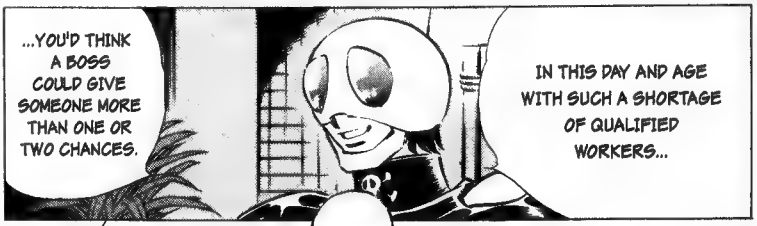
SO, YOU FAILED YOUR ASSIGNMENT, AND LOST THE DISK, TOO?
I'M GOING TO HAVE TO KILL YOU NOW. NOTHING PERSONAL.
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU MARIA... I'M DISAPPOINTED.
IT'S MY DUTY.

HMM. SO...
...ARE YOU THE MYSTERY MAN?
YEAH, BUT I'M NOT AFTER THE DISK.
HEH-HEH...
I WAS WAITING FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU TO COME AROUND.
YOU'VE FALLEN FOR MY TRAP!


GOLEGH

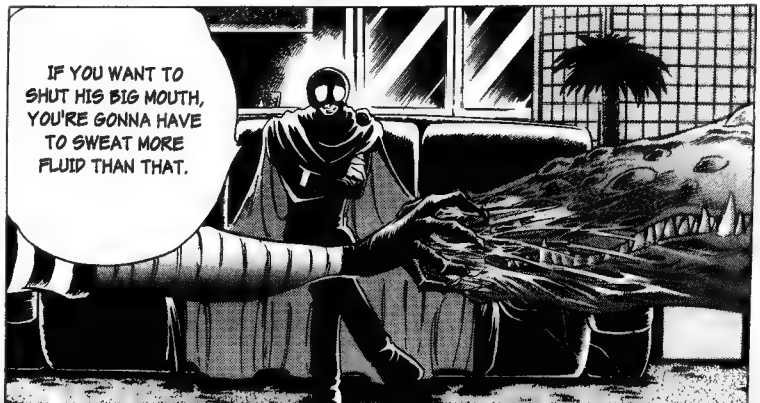
NOW, SUCK ON THIS!
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S IN THE TRAP...!
HOW DO YOU LIKE MY WEB FLUID? TASTY, ISN'T IT?
OGG.. NGRH..!
IN A FEW MOMENTS, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO BREATHE ANYMORE.
AND HOW DO YOU LIKE HAVING YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE WELDED SHUT?
MY STENCH IS THE LAST THING YOU'LL REMEMBER BEFORE YOU DIE...!
?!

GRRRRR
WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT A SPIDER-GUY LIKE YOU WOULD HAVE GOTTEN CAUGHT IN MY WEB?
!!

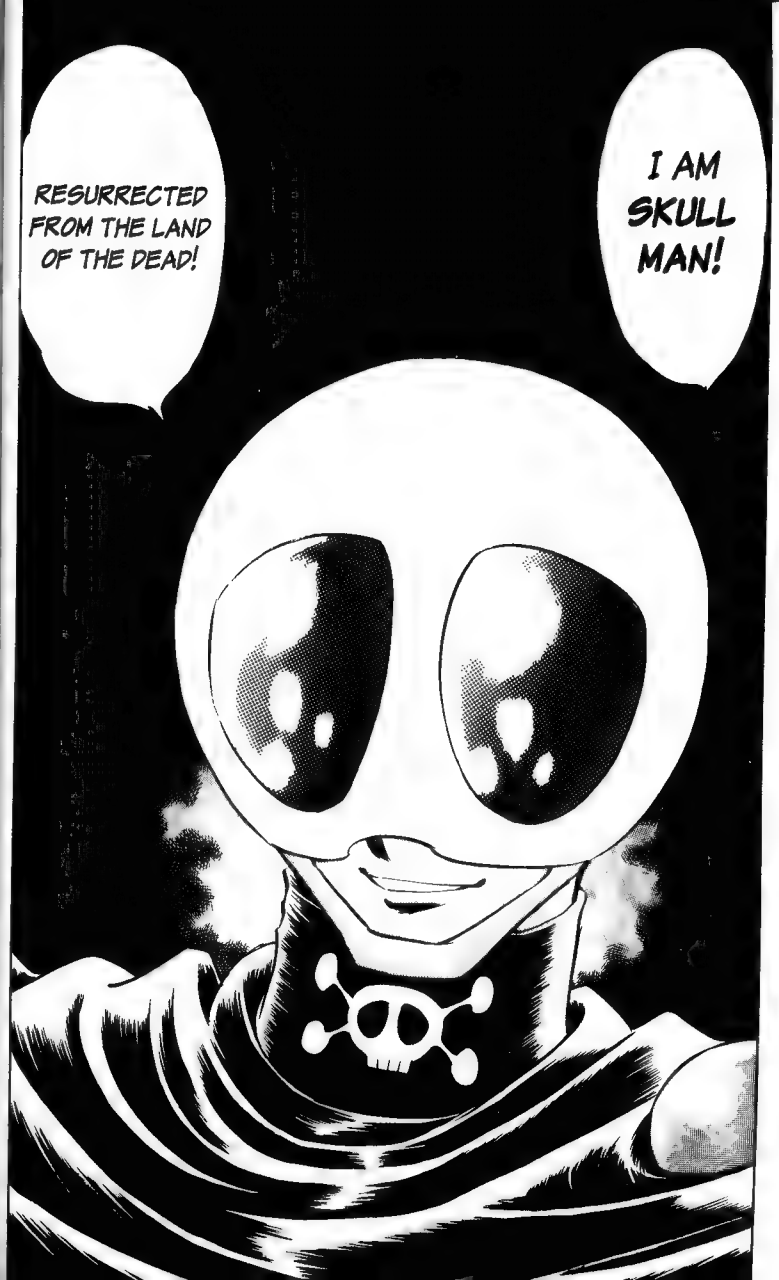

...YOU'D THINK A BOSS COULD GIVE SOMEONE MORE THAN ONE OR TWO CHANCES.
IN THIS DAY AND AGE WITH SUCH A SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED WORKERS...

WHO-WHO ARE YOU?!
IF YOU FACTOR IN THE TIME AND MONEY YOU SPENT TRAINING YOUR HIT MEN, I'D GO A LITTLE EASIER ON THEM.

...CAN'T BE...
THIS...


IF YOU WANT TO SHUT HIS BIG MOUTH, YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SWEAT MORE FLUID THAN THAT.

SO, WHO ARE YOU, SPIDER-BOY?
I'D REALLY...
...LIKE TO FIND OUT.


I AM SKULL MAN!
RESURRECTED FROM THE LAND OF THE DEAD!

ワッカ!!
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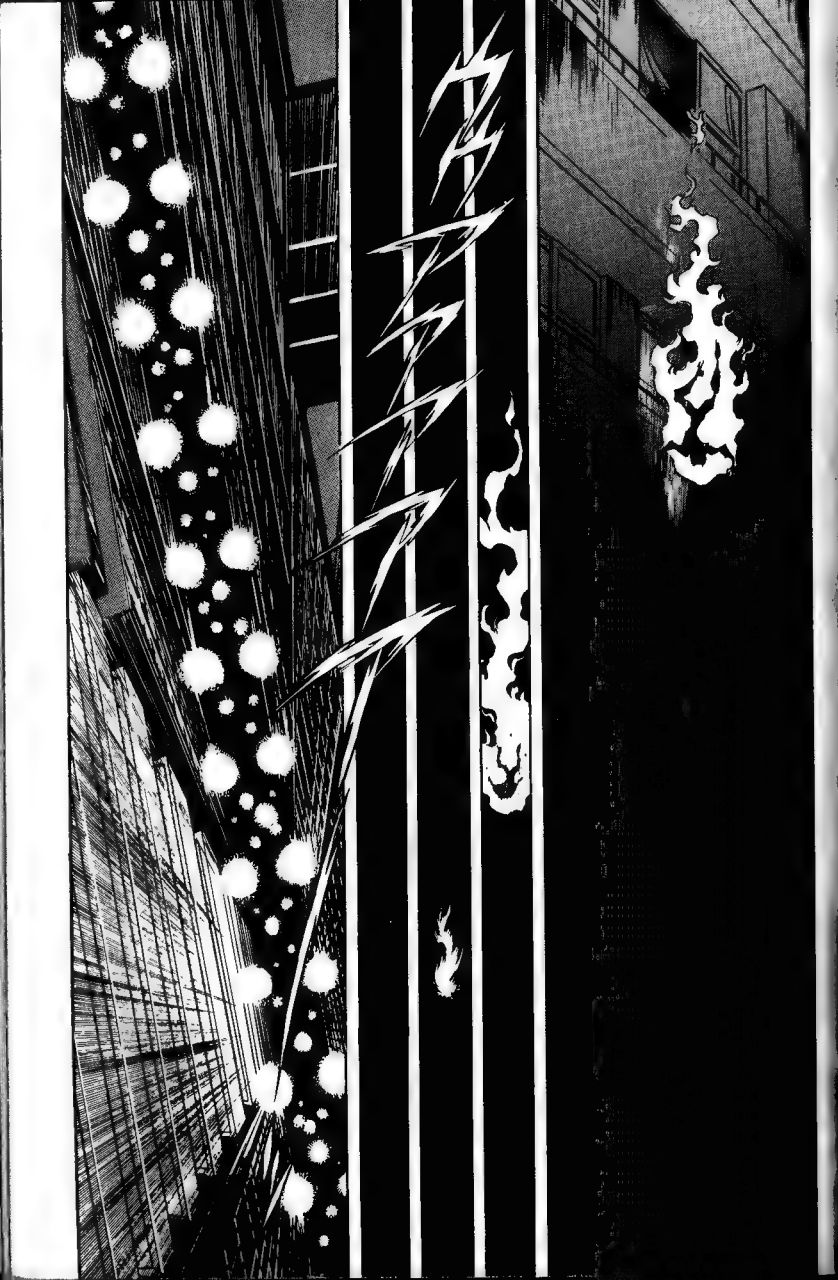
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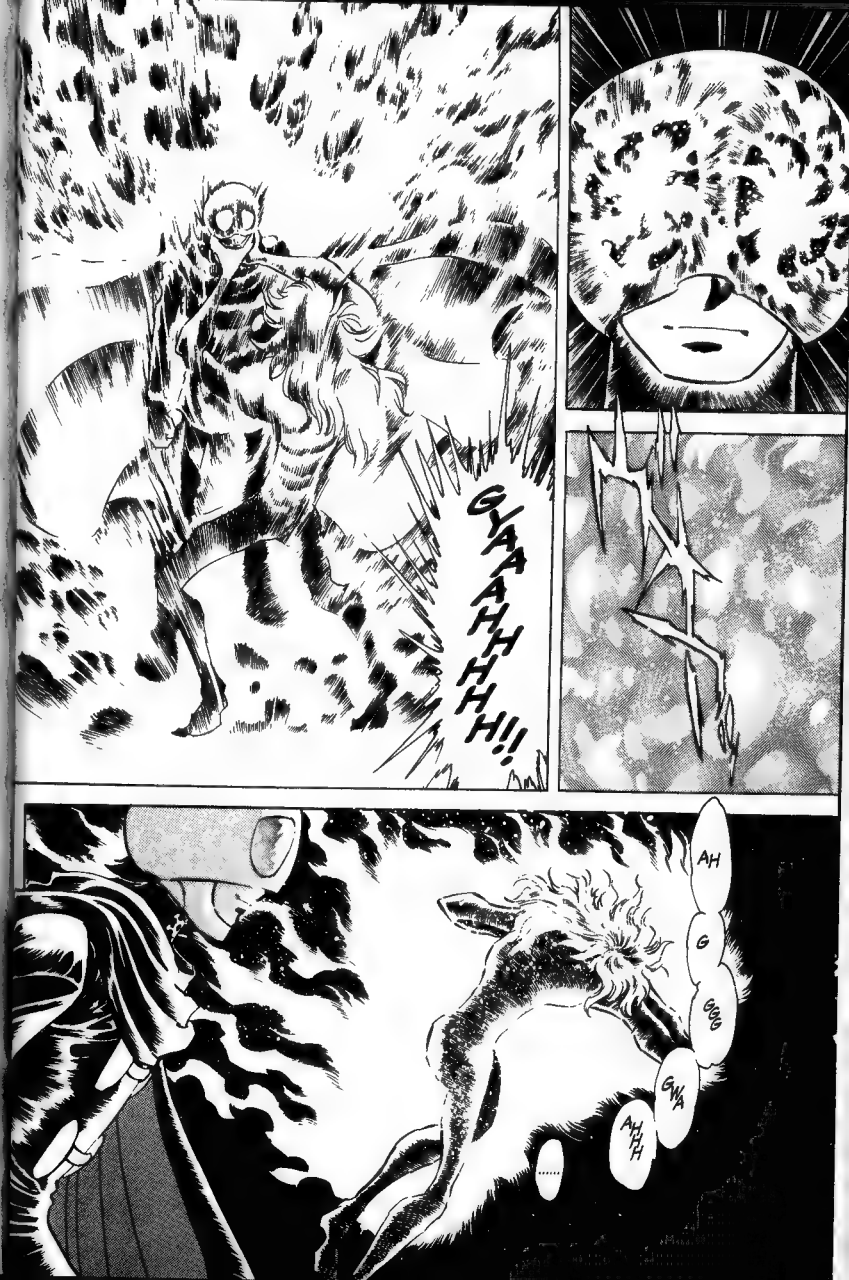
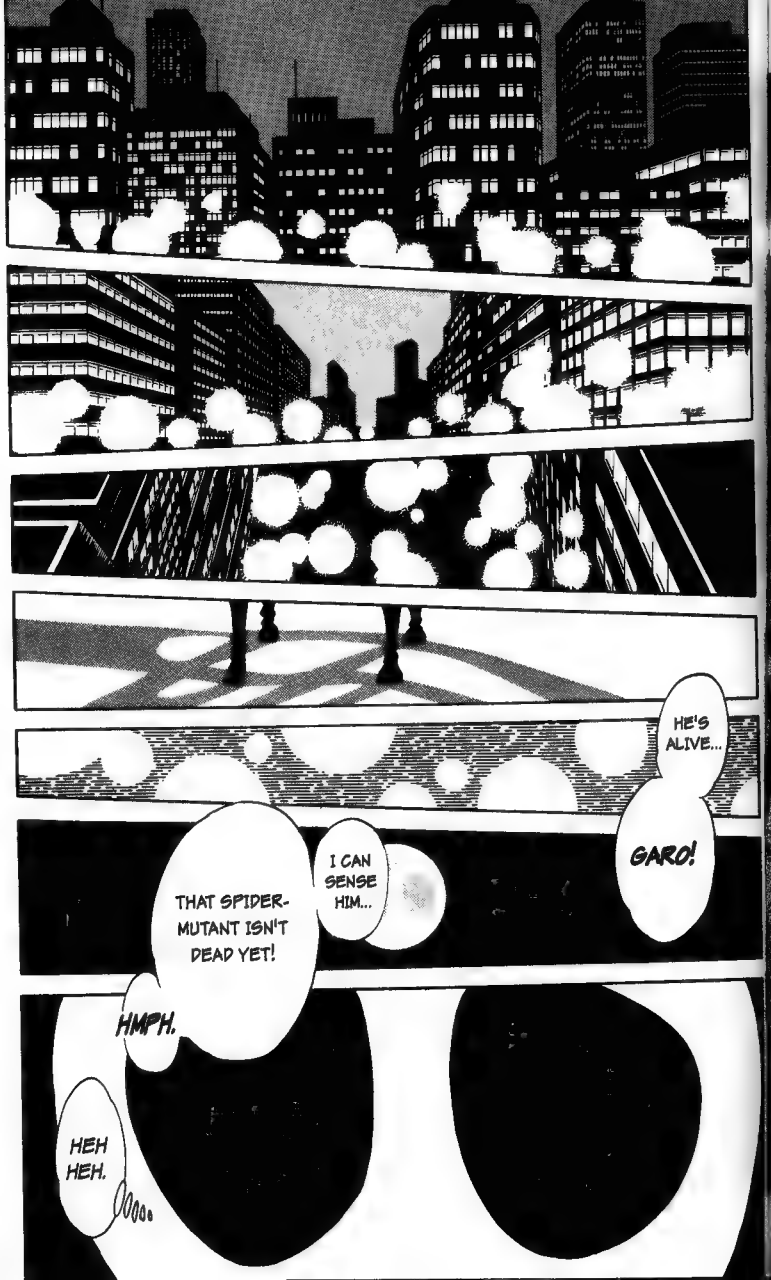
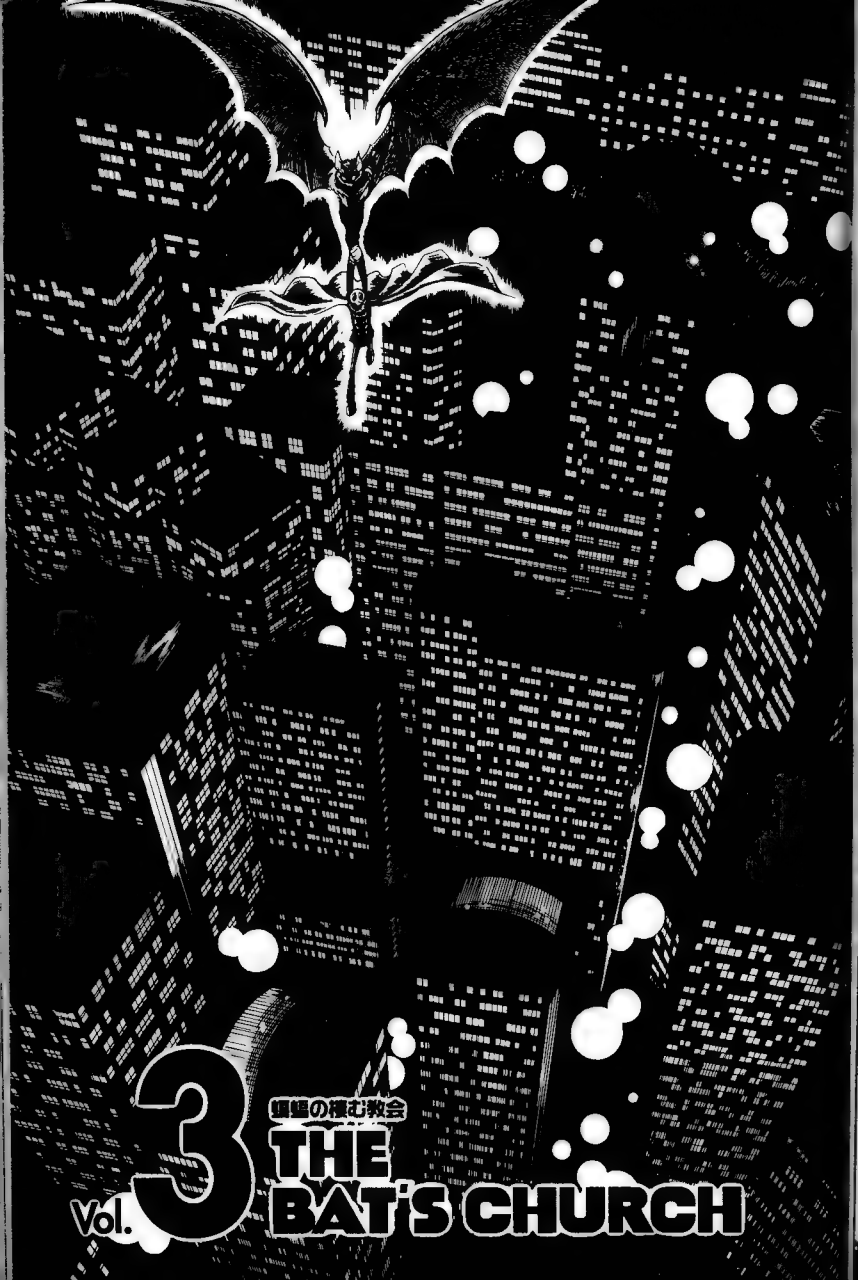

GYAAHHHH!!
AH
G
GGG
GWA
AHHH
.....


HE'S ALIVE...
GARO!
I CAN SENSE HIM...
THAT SPIDER-MUTANT ISN'T DEAD YET!
HMPH.
HEH HEH.

GOLECHE
?!
I CAN MOVE...


Vol. 3
蝙蝠の棲む教会
THE BAT'S CHURCH

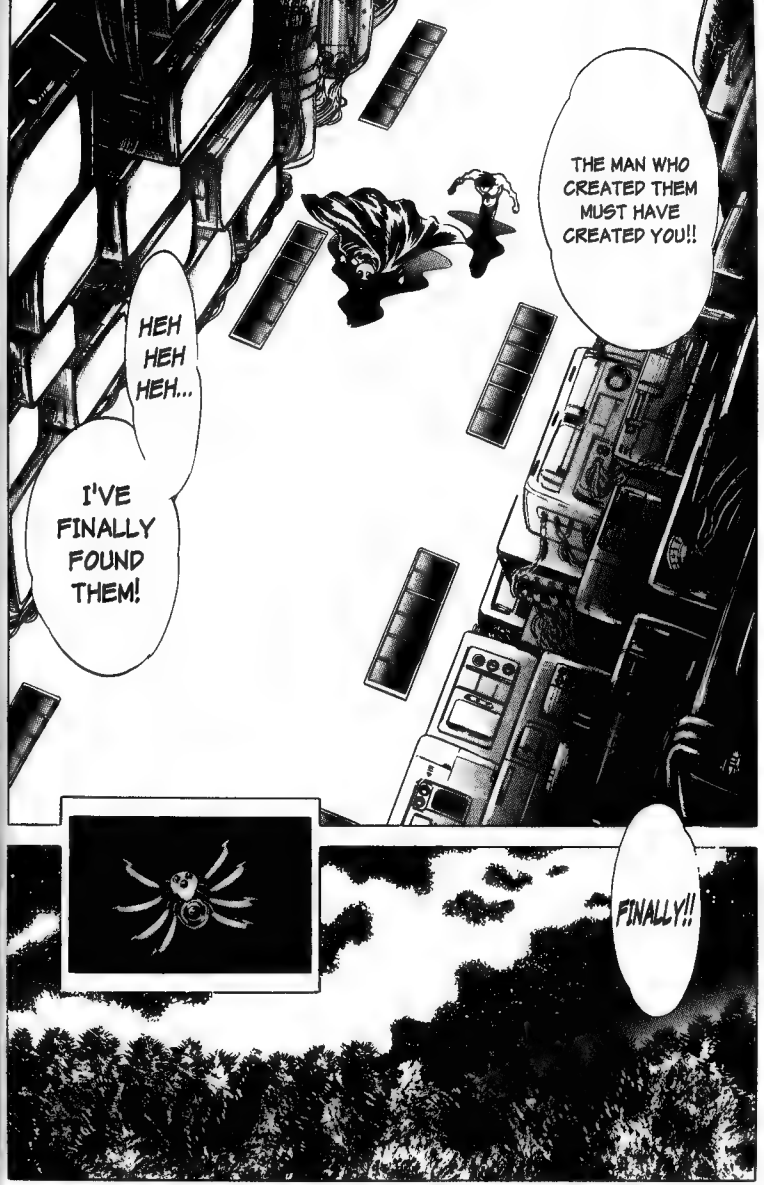
HIS TYPE NEVER DIE EASY.
HEH HEH...
BUT, I WOULDN'T EXPECT ANY LESS FROM ONE OF YOUR BROTHERS.
HA HA HA HA HA!

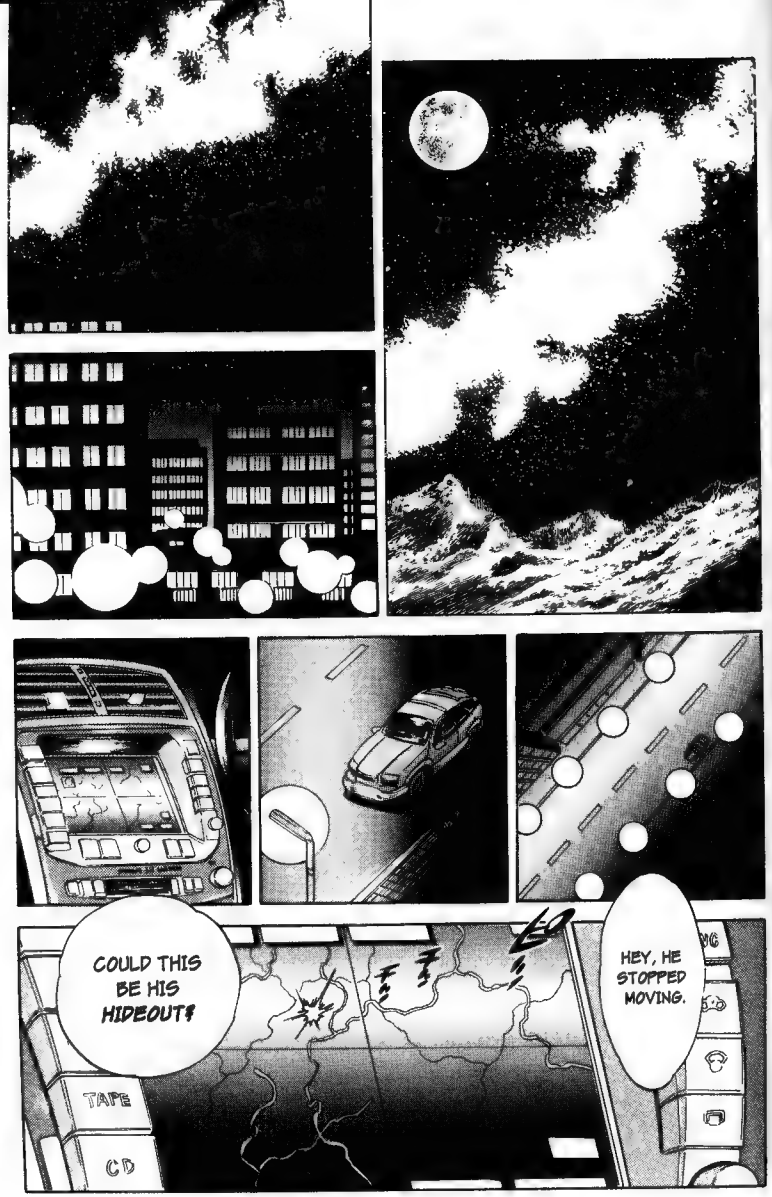
ハア…
ハアハアハアハアハアハアハアハア
……

GOOD WORK.
YOU CAN REST NOW.
YOU DON'T NEED TO WEAR MY FACE HERE ANYMORE...
GARO.

SECRETS ARE MEANING-LESS IN A PLACE LIKE THIS.
YOU CAN GO BACK TO YOUR REAL FACE NOW.

HEH HEH...
TODAY WAS A GOOD DAY. EVEN BETTER THAN I EXPECTED.
WE'VE MET NOT ONE, BUT TWO PEOPLE WHO COULD BE KEY TO MY DESTINY.
AND,
THEY HAVE THE SAME KIND OF POWERS AS YOU.
GARO,
THOSE WERE YOUR BRETHREN! I'M SURE OF IT!


THE MAN WHO CREATED THEM MUST HAVE CREATED YOU!!
HEH HEH HEH...
I'VE FINALLY FOUND THEM!
FINALLY!!


COULD THIS BE HIS HIDEOUT?
HEY, HE STOPPED MOVING.
TAPE
CD

I HOPE YOU'LL KEEP YOUR WORD, SPIDER!
MARIA!
...YOU DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO KILL ME RIGHT NOW, ANYWAY.
WELL, EVEN IF YOU WERE LYING...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
HE SET YOU ON FIRE, DIDN'T HE?

SON OF A BITCH...!
BUT, I'M DISCI-PLINED.
IF THE BOSS FINDS OUT ABOUT THIS, I'M DEAD MEAT.
...THE SKULL MAN MUST DIE!
BEFORE I TAKE CARE OF MARIA...

WELL, I'M COMING WITH YOU.
SO, YOU FOUND HIS HIDEOUT?
HMPH!
IT MUST HAVE TAKEN A LOT OUT OF YOU TO HEAL YOURSELF.
I'M IN THE SAME BOAT AS YOU NOW.
OKAY, OKAY.
ALRIGHT?
BUT, FIRST...
ﾅﾙﾎﾄ!

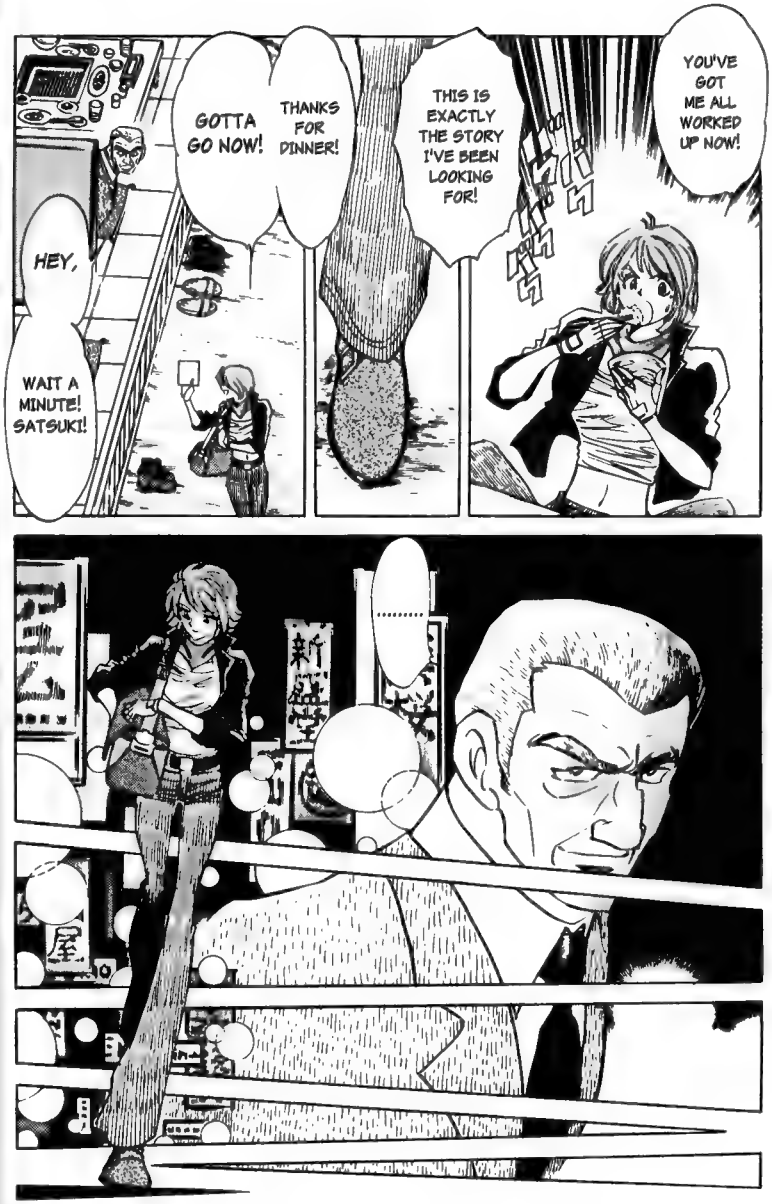
LET'S GET SOMETHING TO EAT.
LIKE YOU SAID, I'M SO LOW ON ENERGY NOW, I CAN BARELY MOVE.
YOU GOT IT.
YOU'RE LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH AN ELEGANT DINING PARTNER.
YOU BETTER MAKE SURE IT'S A NICE PLACE!
SURE, SURE... I'VE GOT JUST THE PLACE IN MIND.

BUT YOU WOULDN'T GET THAT FROM THE POLICE RECORD.
YOU'RE RIGHT. THAT WAS NO SUICIDE.
...YOU THINK IT'S FISHY, TOO?
IN CHICKEN, BEEF, AND PORK
CHICKEN BBQ ¥800
OH, SO THEN...
...KNOW ANYTHING?
DO YOU...
CALL IT A HUNCH.
SOMETHING JUST BUGS ME ABOUT IT.
...A SIMILAR RASH OF INCIDENTS, THINGS THAT COULDN'T BE EXPLAINED AWAY NEATLY, WAS OCCURRING EVERYWHERE.
A LONG TIME AGO...

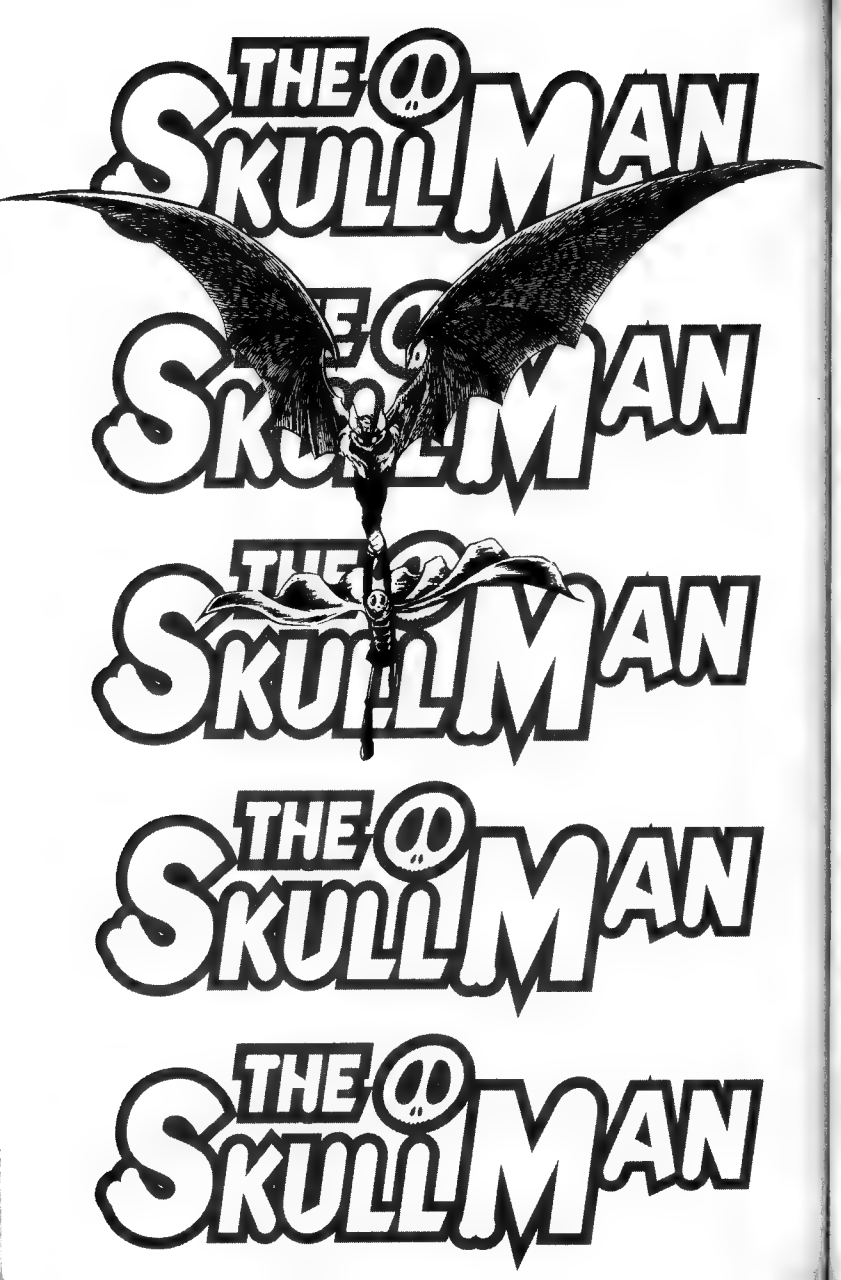
KOREAN BBQ
KOREAN BBQ
IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A SUICIDE, DOES IT?
NO, IT DOESN'T.
SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT CASE?
Weekly
More headline stories!
A secret late-night rendezvous!
The story behind Bureaucrat Oshige's suicide.

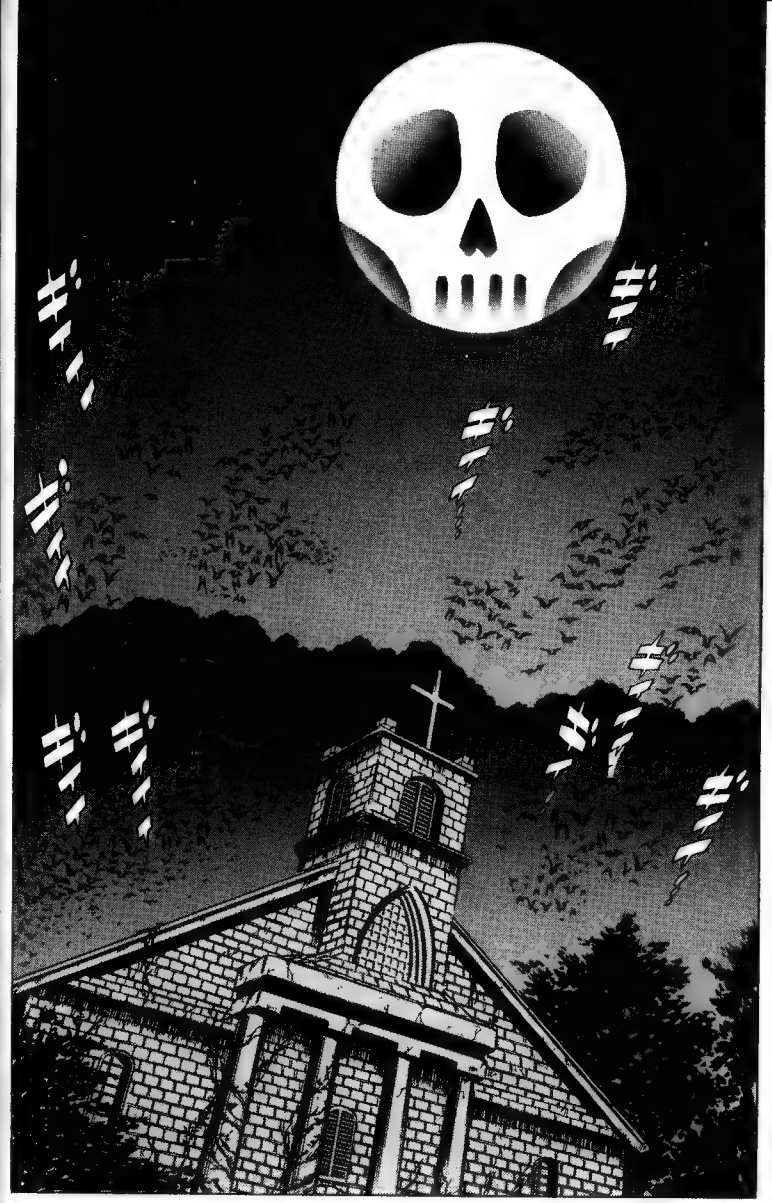
AT THE TIME, I WAS FOLLOWING THIS MAN.
WHAT'S THIS?
YOU WOULDN'T BE SAYING THAT IF HE WERE STANDING IN FRONT OF YOU.
SOME KIND OF COSTUMED FREAK?
HE WAS AN AGENT FROM THE LAND OF THE DEAD.
HE WAS THE REAL THING.
IF YOU LOOKED INTO HIS EYES, YOUR BLOOD WOULD RUN COLD.

.....
HAVE YOU MET THIS MAN BEFORE?
ER, WHAT'S HIS NAME...?
HE CALLS HIMSELF THE SKULL MAN.
AND, YES, I HAVE MET HIM.
HIS CRIMES ARE THE KIND THAT NEVER MAKE IT INTO THE PAPERS.
POWERFUL FORCES MAKE SURE THAT HIS IDENTITY, AND HIS CRIMES, ARE HIDDEN FROM THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA.
CAN I TAKE THIS PHOTO?
DON'T BOTHER. YOU'RE JUST WASTING YOUR TIME. PEOPLE HAVE A WAY OF DISAPPEARING...
YOU'RE DEALING WITH VERY DANGEROUS ELEMENTS HERE.
...WHEN THEY GET TOO CLOSE.
NO WAY!
NO WAY!


YOU'VE GOT ME ALL WORKED UP NOW!
THIS IS EXACTLY THE STORY I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR!
THANKS FOR DINNER!
GOTTA GO NOW!
HEY, WAIT A MINUTE! SATSUKI!
.....

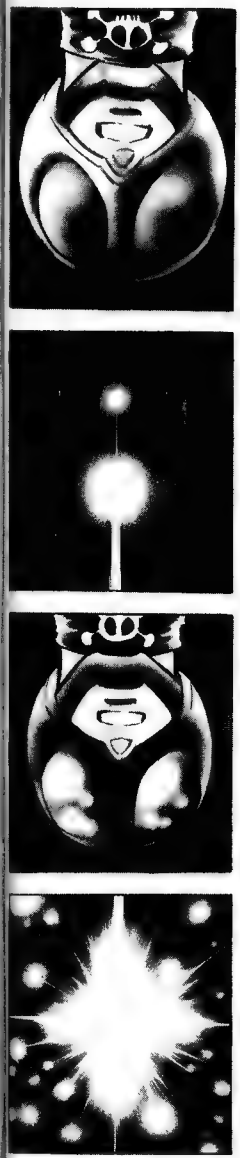
THE NIGHT...
THE NIGHT MAKES ME AFRAID.
IT BECKONS ME TO SLEEP,
AND SLEEP BECKONS ME BACK, TO THE LAND OF THE DEAD.
!!


THE SKULL MAN
THE SKULL MAN
THE SKULL MAN
THE SKULL MAN
THE SKULL MAN

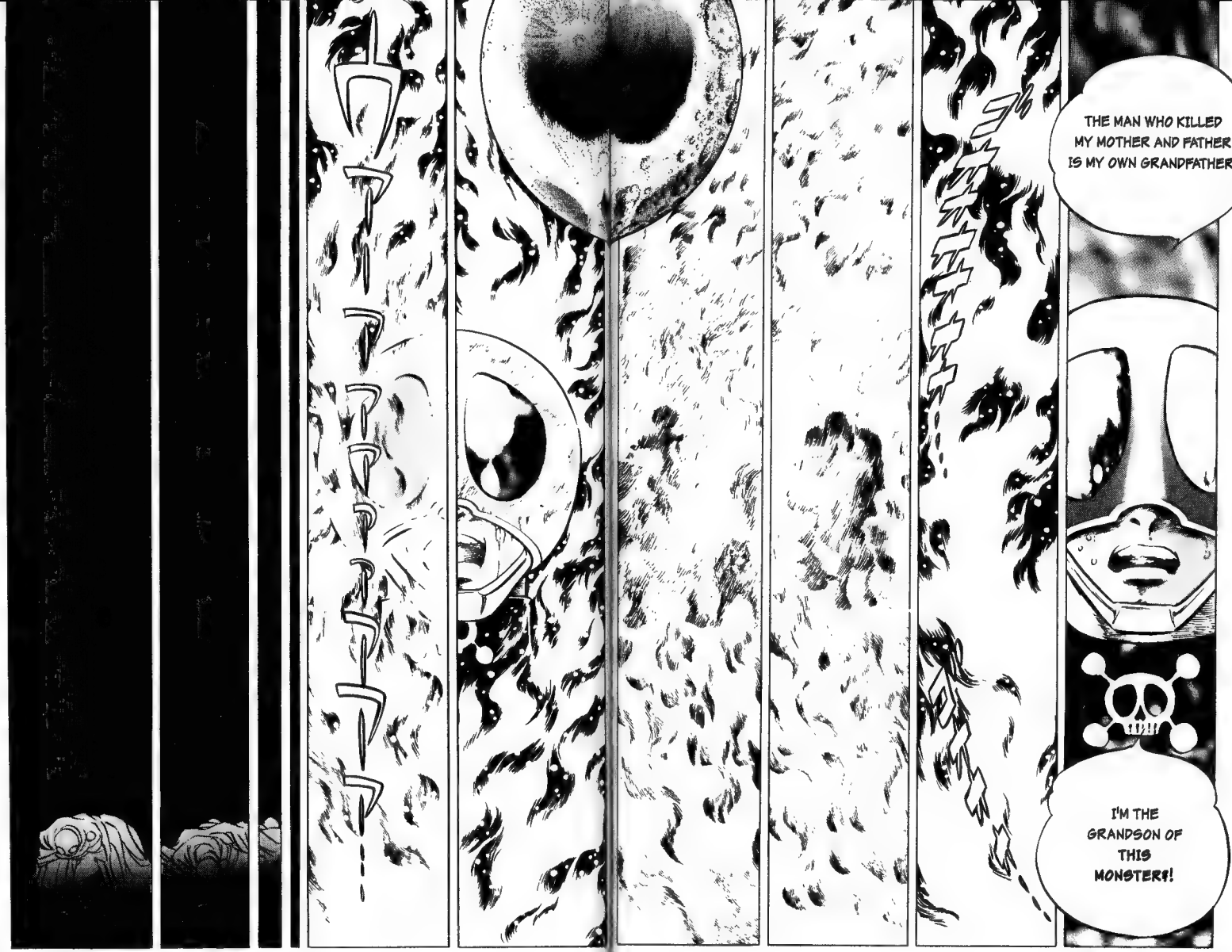


炎の中の髑髏
Vol. 4
SKULL
IN THE FIRE

WE WERE NOT MEANT TO BE...

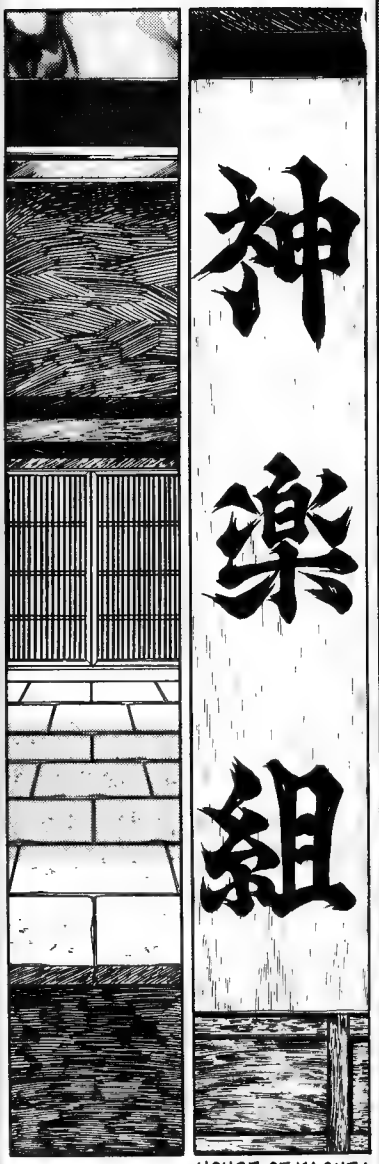


WE WERE NOT MEANT TO BE BORN IN THIS TIME.
TATSUO...

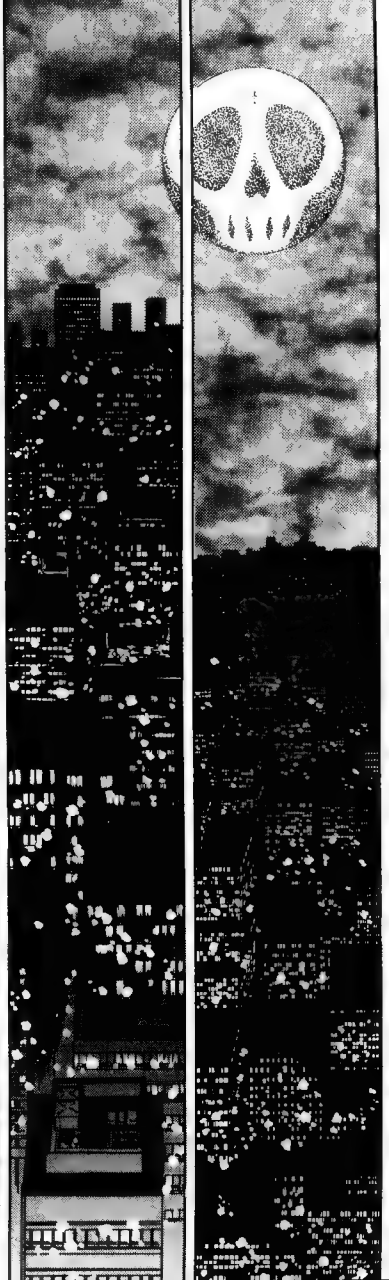

THE MAN WHO KILLED MY MOTHER AND FATHER IS MY OWN GRANDFATHER!
I'M THE GRANDSON OF THIS MONSTER!!

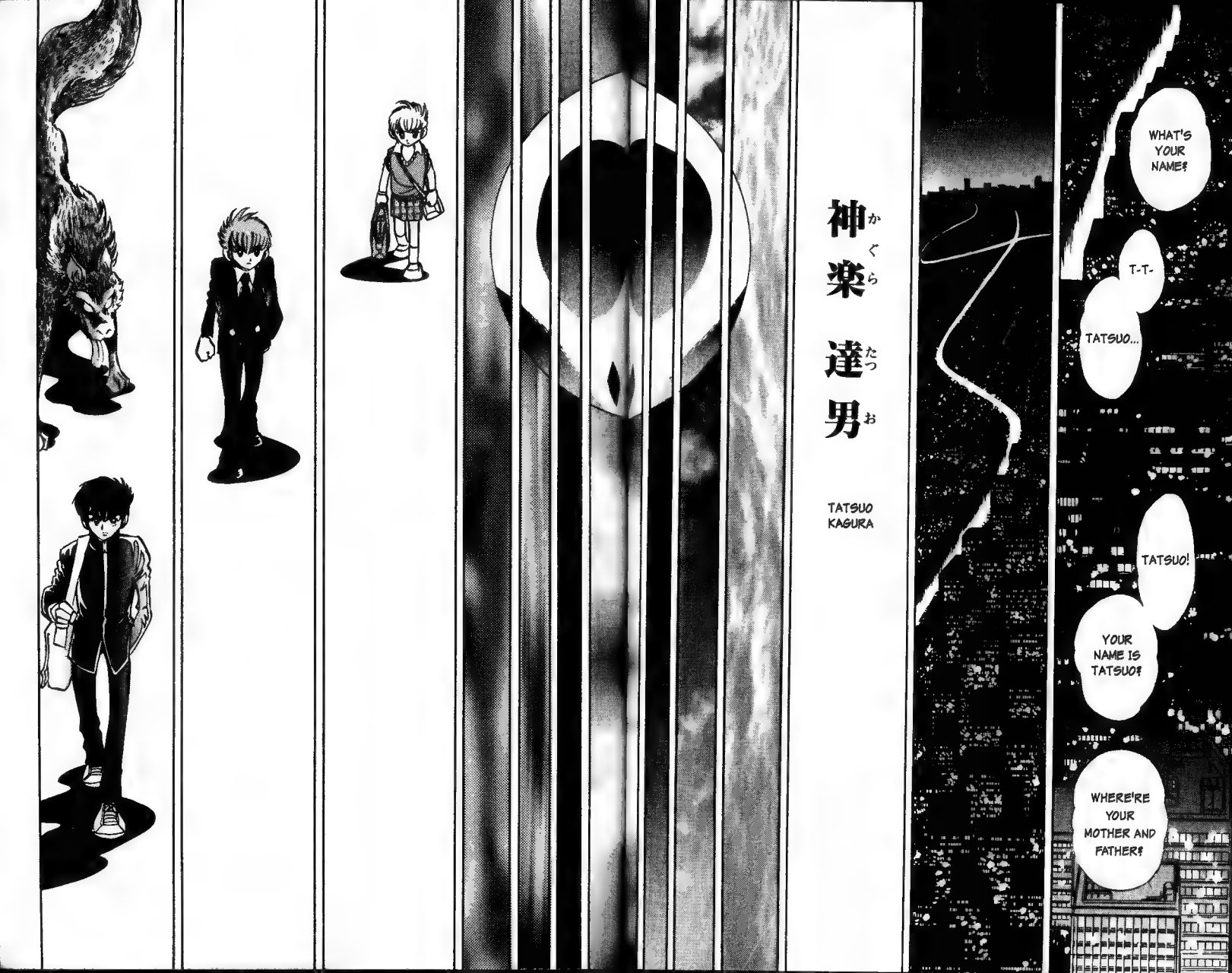
TATSUO.
TATSUO...
TATSUO.

TATSUO.
2 YEARS-OLD.
.....
I CAN'T LET THIS GO ON.
IF I LET THEM CONTINUE WITH THEIR EXPERIMENTS, SOMETHING TERRIBLE WILL HAPPEN.
I CAN'T LET THEIR WORK BE KNOWN...

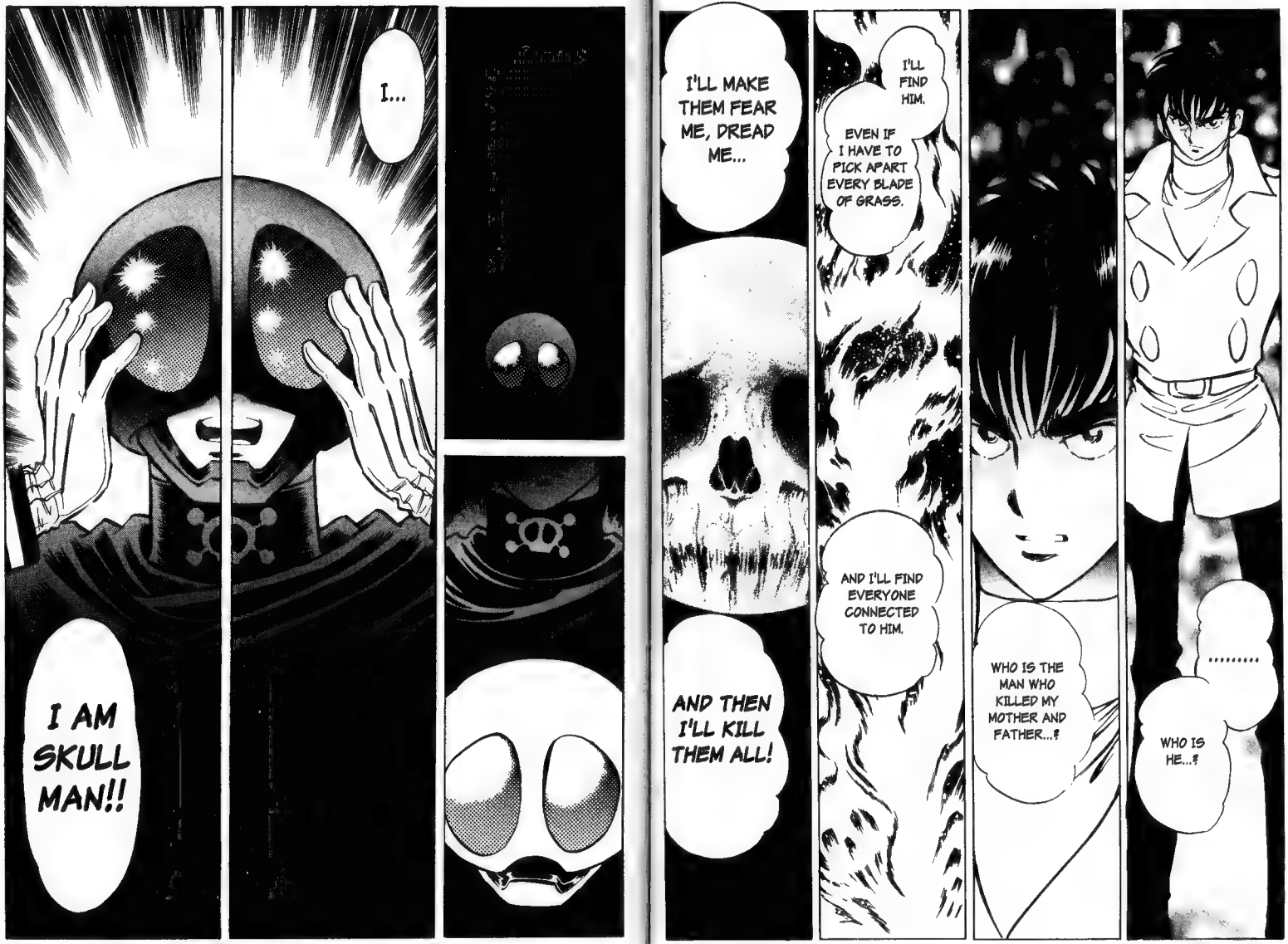


HOUSE OF KAGURA

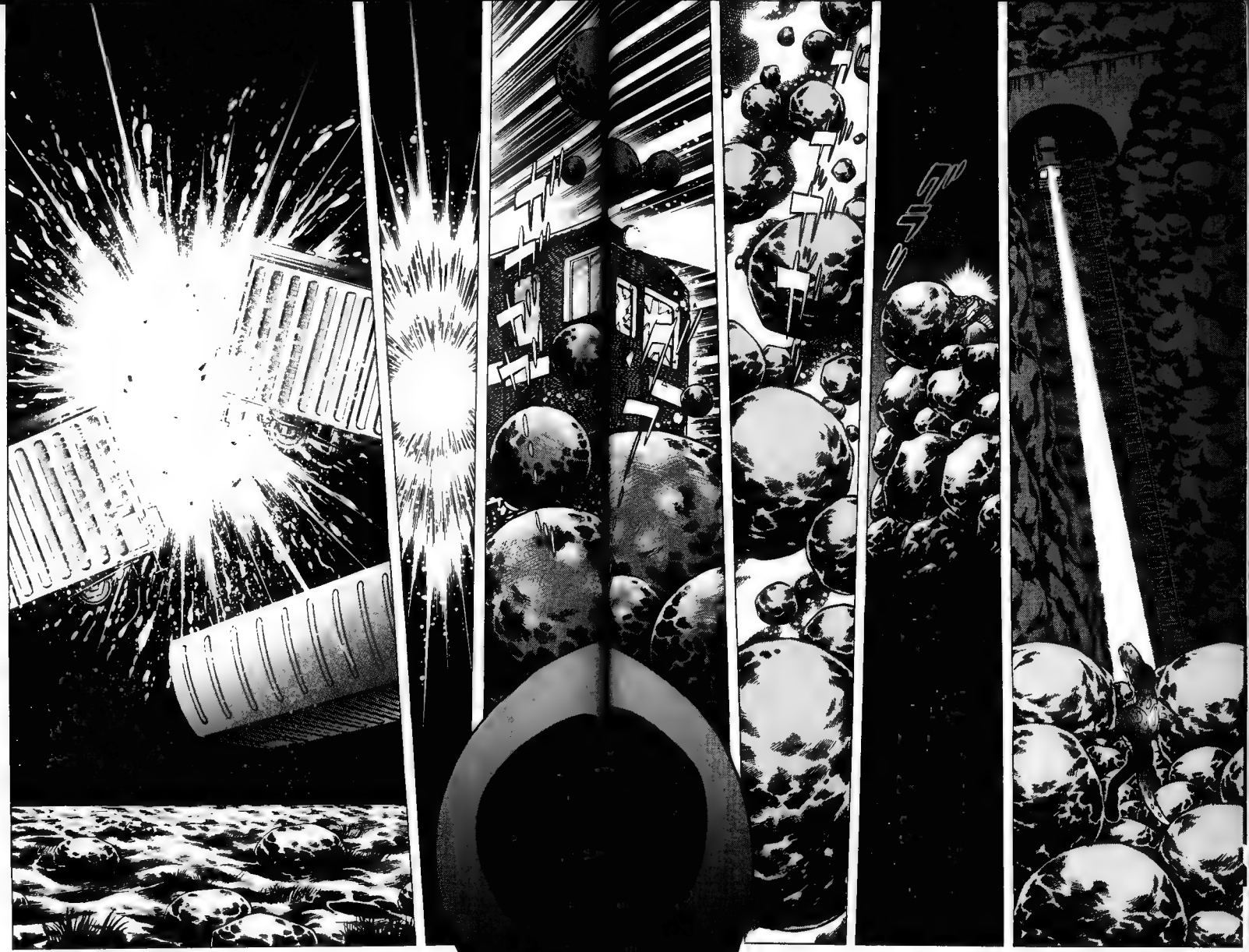


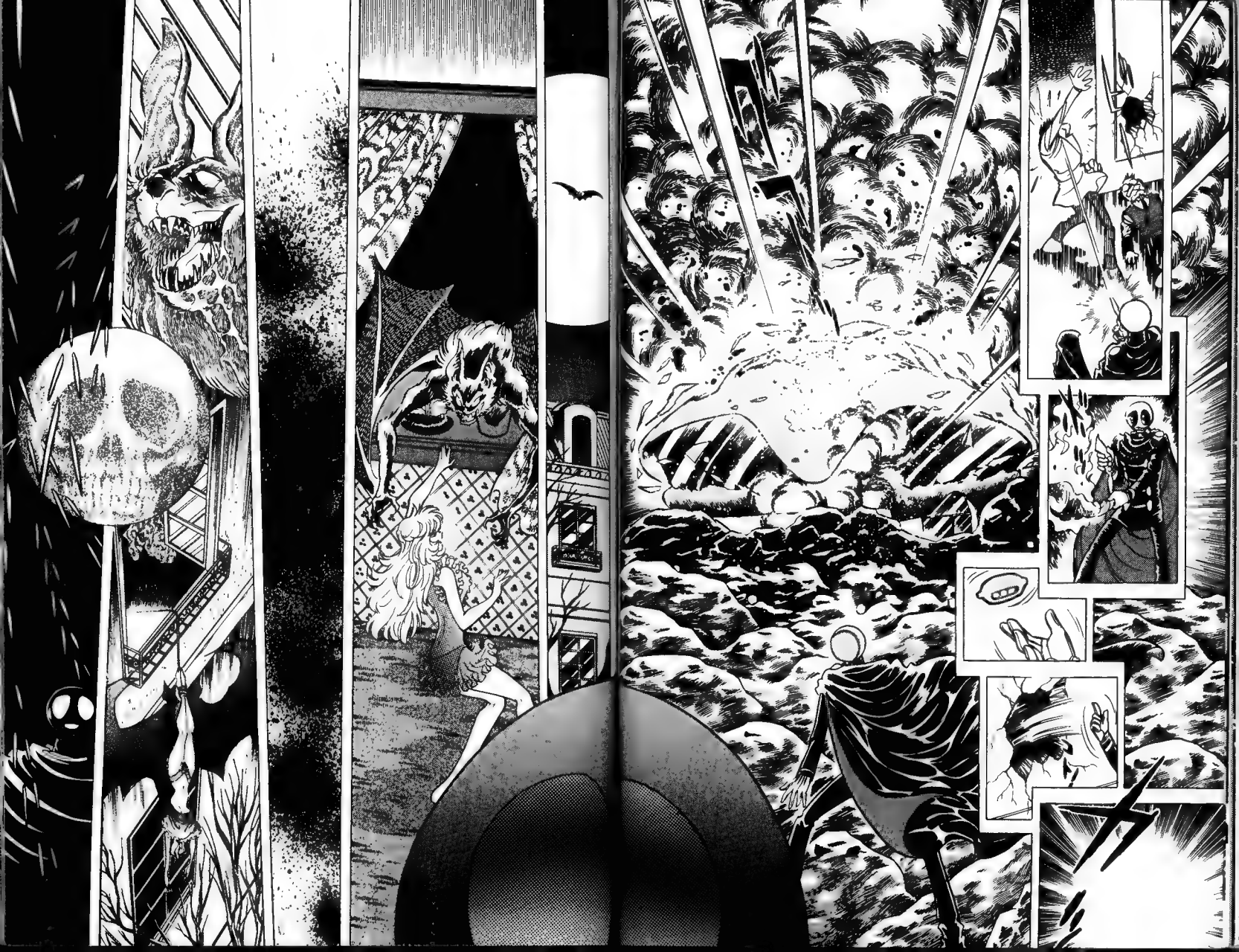

神楽達男
TATSUO KAGURA
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
T-T-
TATSUO...
TATSUO!
YOUR NAME IS TATSUO?
WHERE'RE YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER?

TATSUO KAGURA, 17 YEARS-OLD.


WHO IS HE...?
.....
WHO IS THE MAN WHO KILLED MY MOTHER AND FATHER...?
AND I'LL FIND EVERYONE CONNECTED TO HIM.
I'LL FIND HIM.
EVEN IF I HAVE TO PICK APART EVERY BLADE OF GRASS.
I'LL MAKE THEM FEAR ME, DREAD ME...
AND THEN I'LL KILL THEM ALL!
I...
I AM SKULL MAN!!

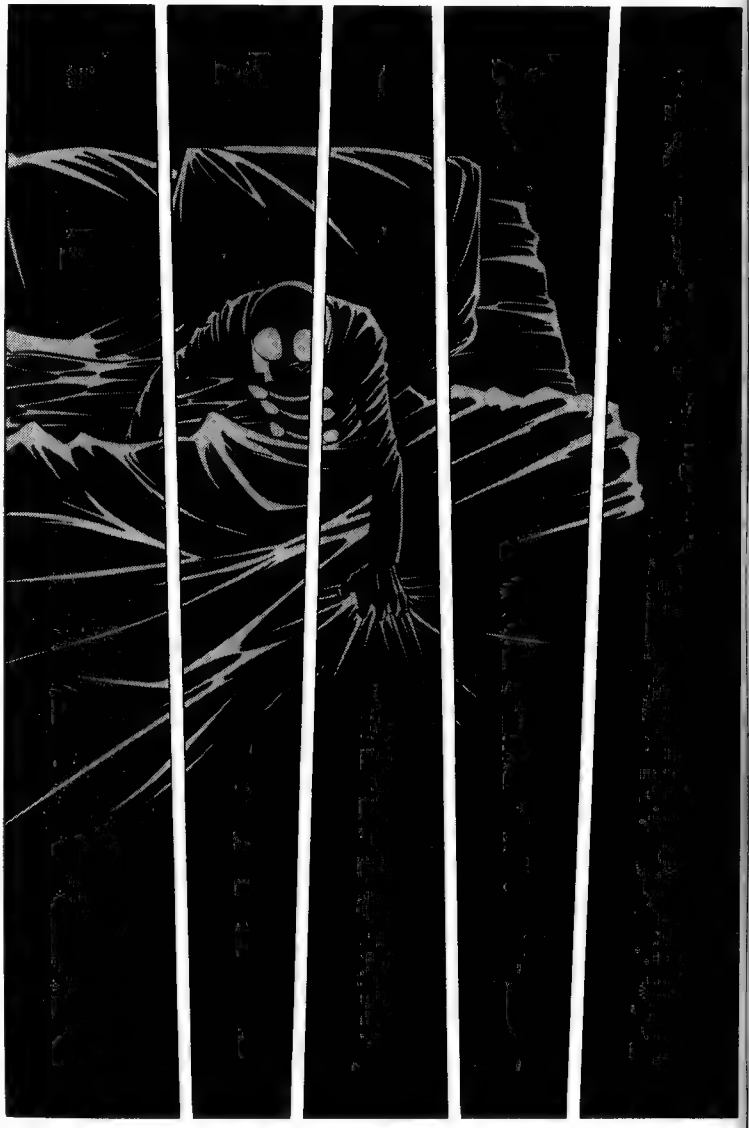
I AM...
...SKULL MAN!!
I WILL UNEARTH THE EVIL OF MEN - THE DIRTY SECRETS AND SINS THAT THEY HIDE. I WILL CHASE THEM TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, TO THEIR DEATH. I AM THE AVENGING ANGEL, AND I WILL HAVE THEIR BLOOD ON MY HANDS...





TORATSUKI CHISATO

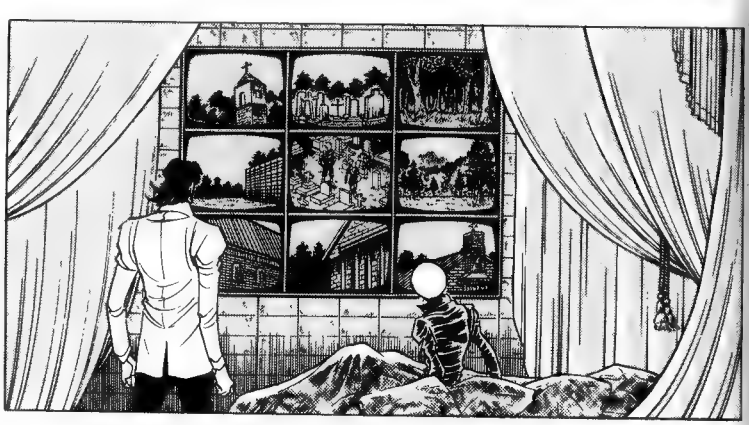
WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN BORN...
LET'S DIE, TATSUO...
TOGETHER.



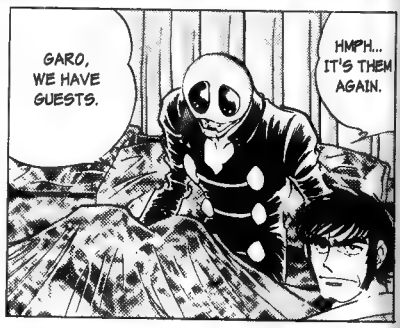
Vol. 5 インサイド・ストレンジャー（前編）
INSIDE STRANGER -THE FIRST PART-

WHY COULDN'T YOU JUST LET ME DIE?!
GARO!

AA... EGGHHH...
GA... GARO...
TELL ME, WHY DIDN'T I DIE BACK THEN...?
GARO...

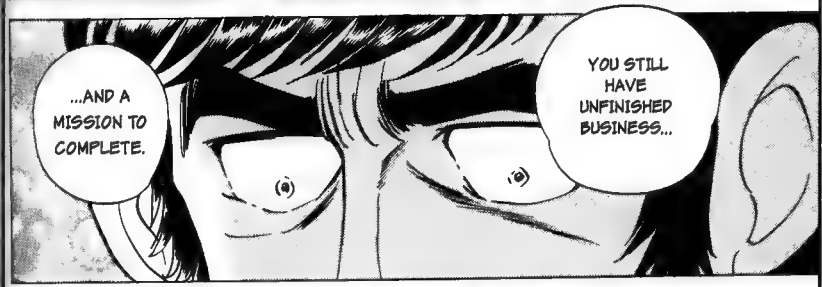


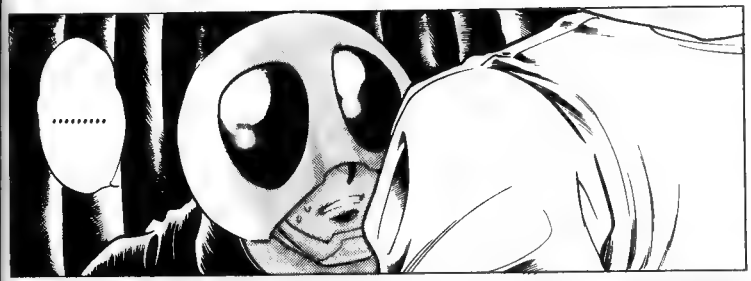
AND SO SOON.
WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED THEY WOULD COME TOGETHER?

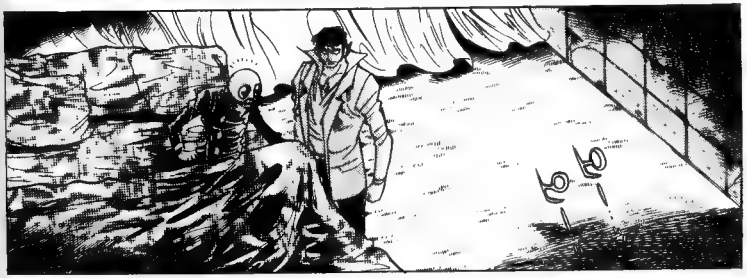

GARO, WE HAVE GUESTS.
HMPH... IT'S THEM AGAIN.

LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE GOT MORE BACKBONE THAN I THOUGHT.

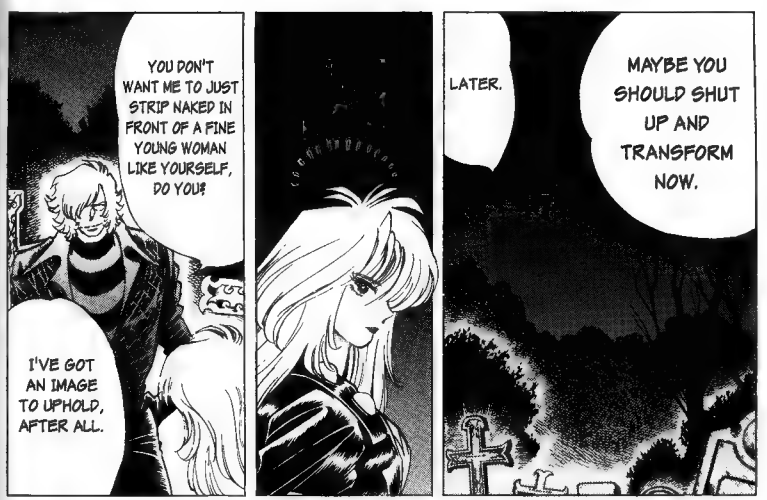
TATSUO...
.....

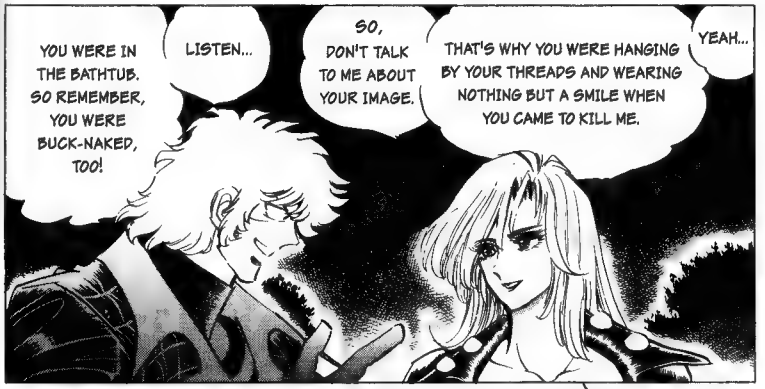

...AND A MISSION TO COMPLETE.
YOU STILL HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS...

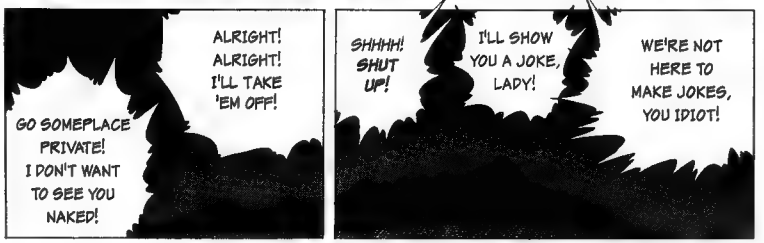

.....



SHH!
I'VE GOT TO GIVE THEM SOME POINTS FOR STYLE.
HOW FASHIONABLE. A RUN-DOWN CHURCH IN AN ABANDONED CEMETERY.
THEY'RE HERE!


YOU DON'T WANT ME TO JUST STRIP NAKED IN FRONT OF A FINE YOUNG WOMAN LIKE YOURSELF, DO YOU?
I'VE GOT AN IMAGE TO UPHOLD, AFTER ALL.
LATER.
MAYBE YOU SHOULD SHUT UP AND TRANSFORM NOW.


YOU WERE IN THE BATHTUB. SO REMEMBER, YOU WERE BUCK-NAKED, TOO!
LISTEN...
SO, DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT YOUR IMAGE.
THAT'S WHY YOU WERE HANGING BY YOUR THREADS AND WEARING NOTHING BUT A SMILE WHEN YOU CAME TO KILL ME.
YEAH...

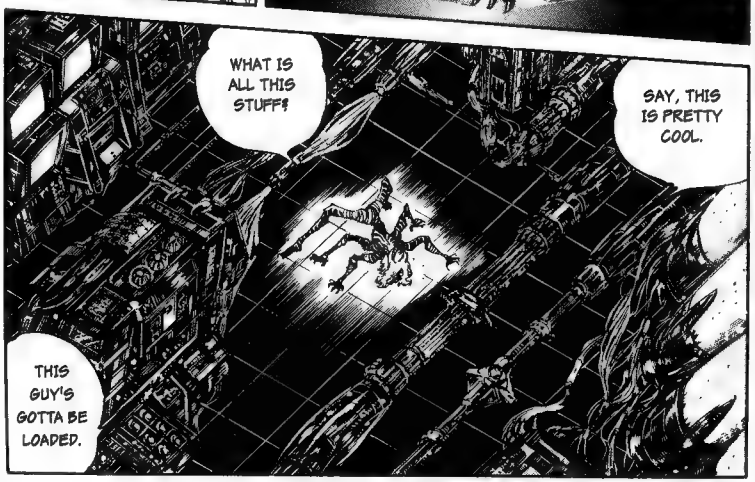

GO SOMEPLACE PRIVATE! I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU NAKED!
ALRIGHT! ALRIGHT! I'LL TAKE 'EM OFF!
SHHHH! SHUT UP!
I'LL SHOW YOU A JOKE, LADY!
WE'RE NOT HERE TO MAKE JOKES, YOU IDIOT!

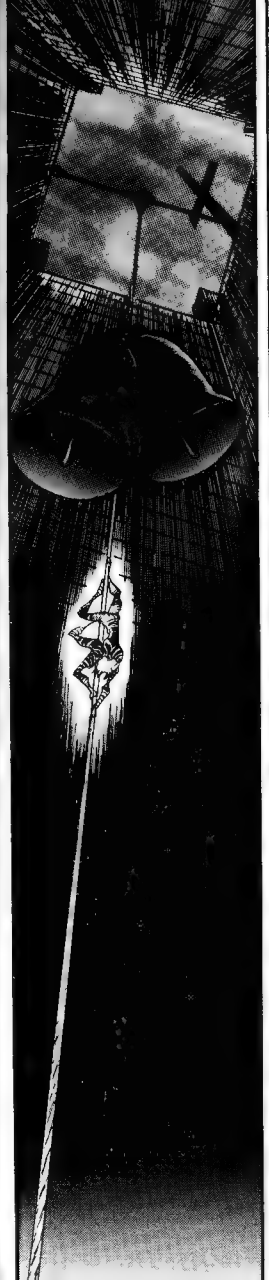
SURE.
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.
PFFT!
IF WE MAKE IT OUT ALIVE, MEET BACK HERE.
THEN I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT THESE EXTRA ARMS ARE GOOD FOR.

WELL, HAVE FUN WITH HIM.
I'LL HELP CLEAN UP WHEN I'M DONE WITH HIS FRIEND.
SEE YA.

YOU CAN HAVE THE SKULL MAN, MARIA.
BESIDES, IT SEEMS THAT HE HAS THE SAME TYPE OF POWERS AS YOU.
KILL POISON WITH POISON...
THEN, SINCE YOU'RE THE BRAWLER, YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF THAT WOLF GUY.
THAT'LL WORK.
THIS COULD BE TRICKY, SINCE HE CAN TRANSFORM INTO MORE THAN ONE SHAPE.
HE WAS AN ALLIGATOR THE LAST TIME.
C'MON, I NEED A BETTER ANSWER THAN THAT.
I'M PUTTING MY LIFE ON THE LINE OVER HERE!
I DON'T COME CHEAP,
AND YOUR LIFE ISN'T WORTH THAT MUCH.
THAT'S COLD.

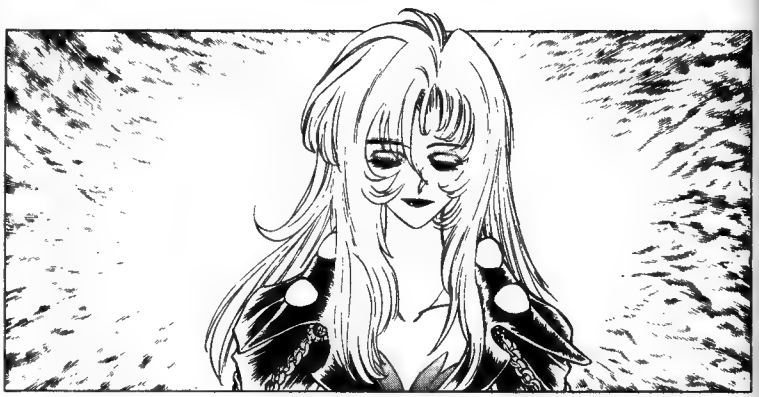
WHOA!

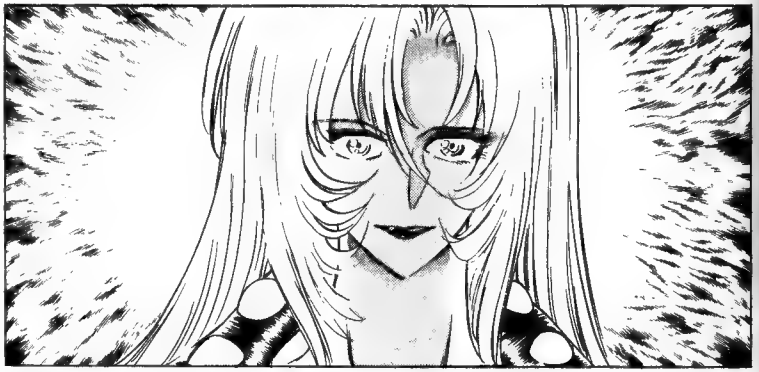

WHAT IS ALL THIS STUFF?
SAY, THIS IS PRETTY COOL.
THIS GUY'S GOTTA BE LOADED.

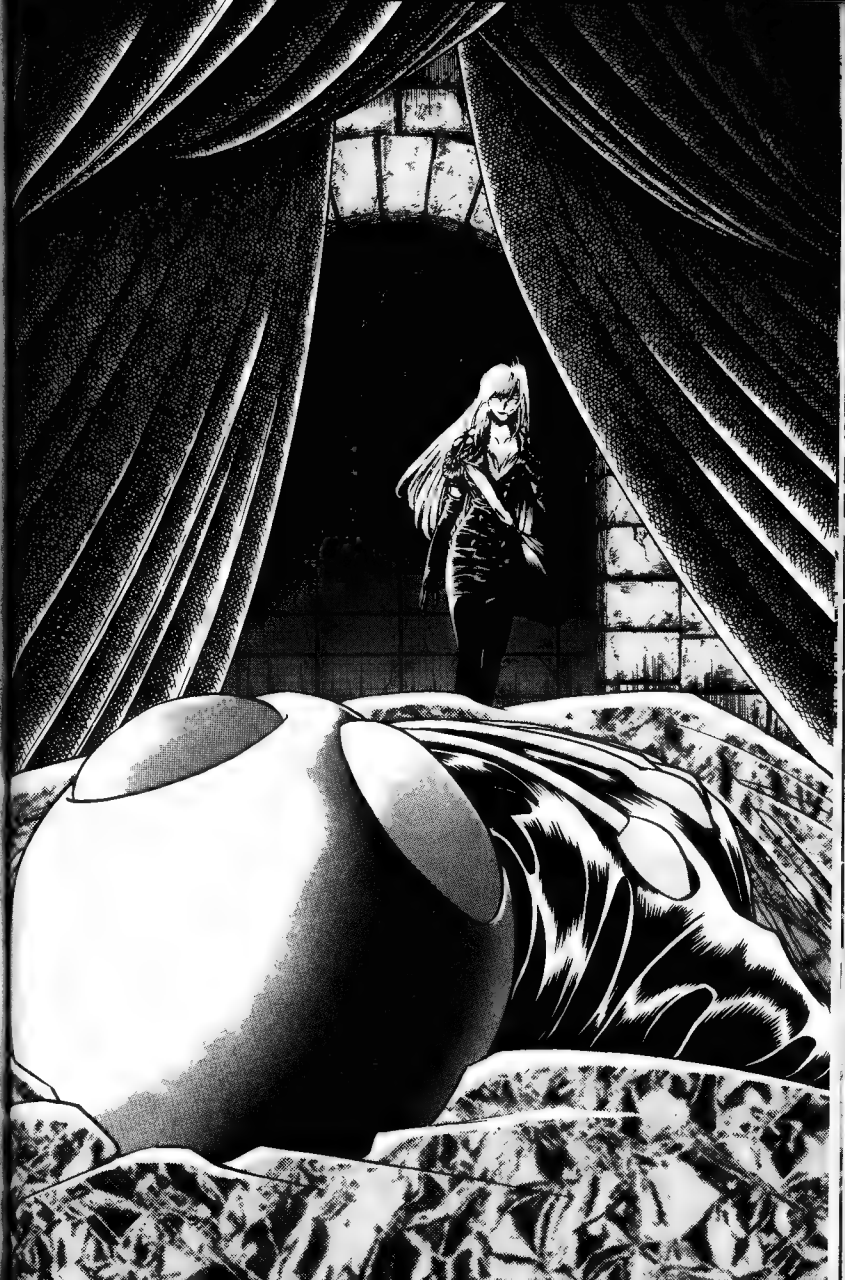


I'VE GOT HIM.
I CAN FEEL HIM.
HIS CONSCIOUS-NESS... COLD AS ICE.
HE'S ASLEEP.

HMM?

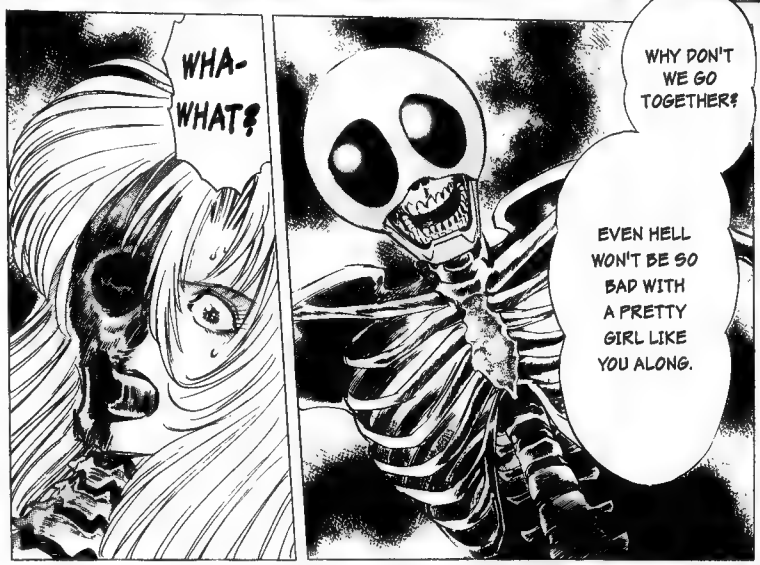


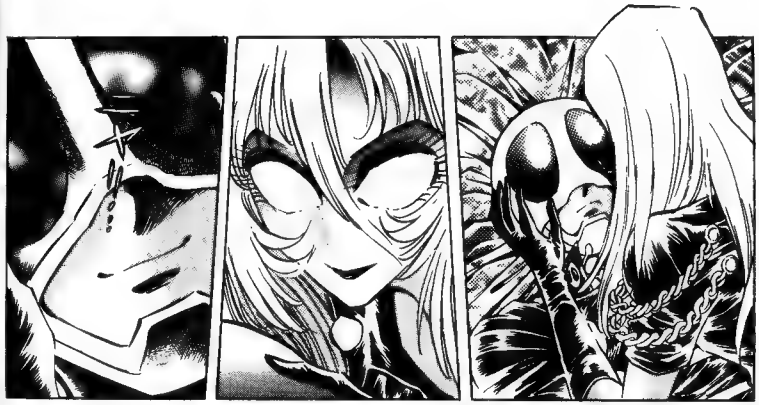




YOU'RE ASLEEP...
YOU REALLY ARE A PIECE OF WORK, Y'KNOW?
DO YOU ALWAYS SLEEP WITH YOUR MASK ON?
I'LL MAKE IT SO YOU WON'T HAVE TO WEAR THIS MASK ANYMORE.
YOU CAN HAVE A ONE-WAY TICKET BACK TO THE LAND OF THE DEAD.

AGHHH!


WHA-
WHAT?
WHY DON'T WE GO TOGETHER?
EVEN HELL WON'T BE SO BAD WITH A PRETTY GIRL LIKE YOU ALONG.

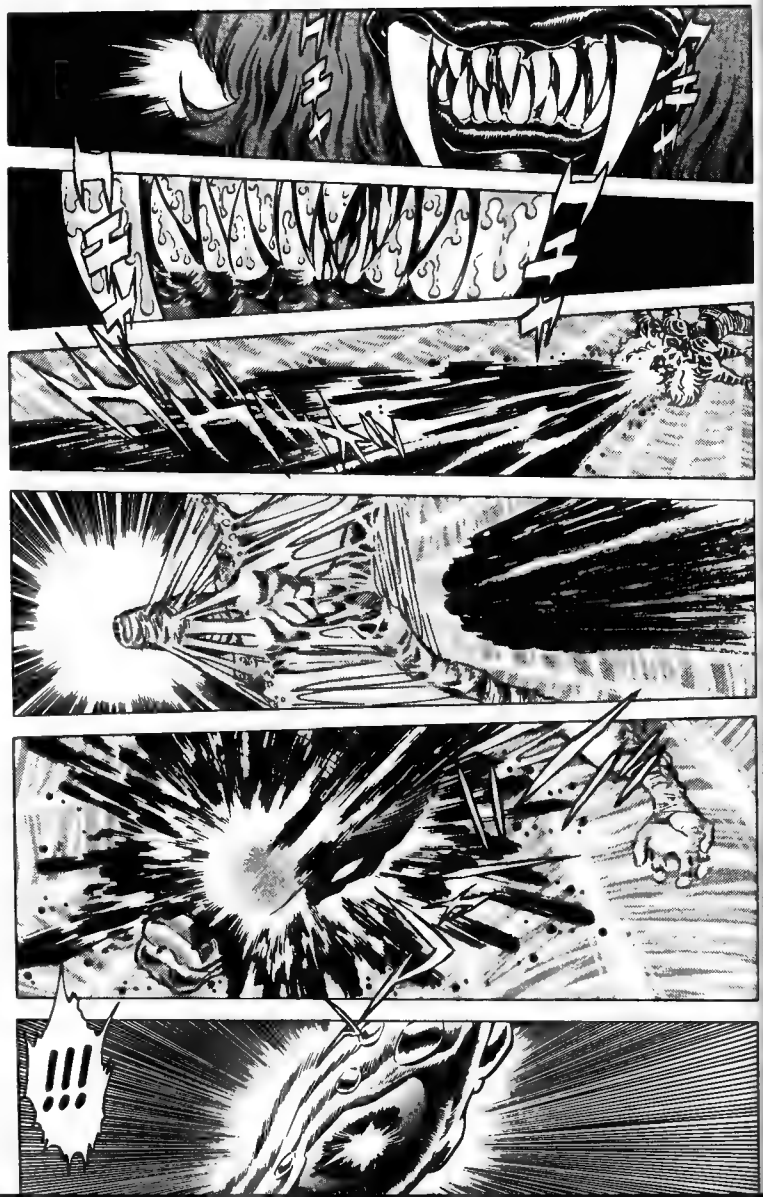


WHAT?!

I'M SURE YOU'VE SENT MANY A SOUL TO HELL, BUT, I'LL BET YOU'VE NEVER BEEN THERE YOURSELF.
HOW ABOUT TAKING THE TOUR?

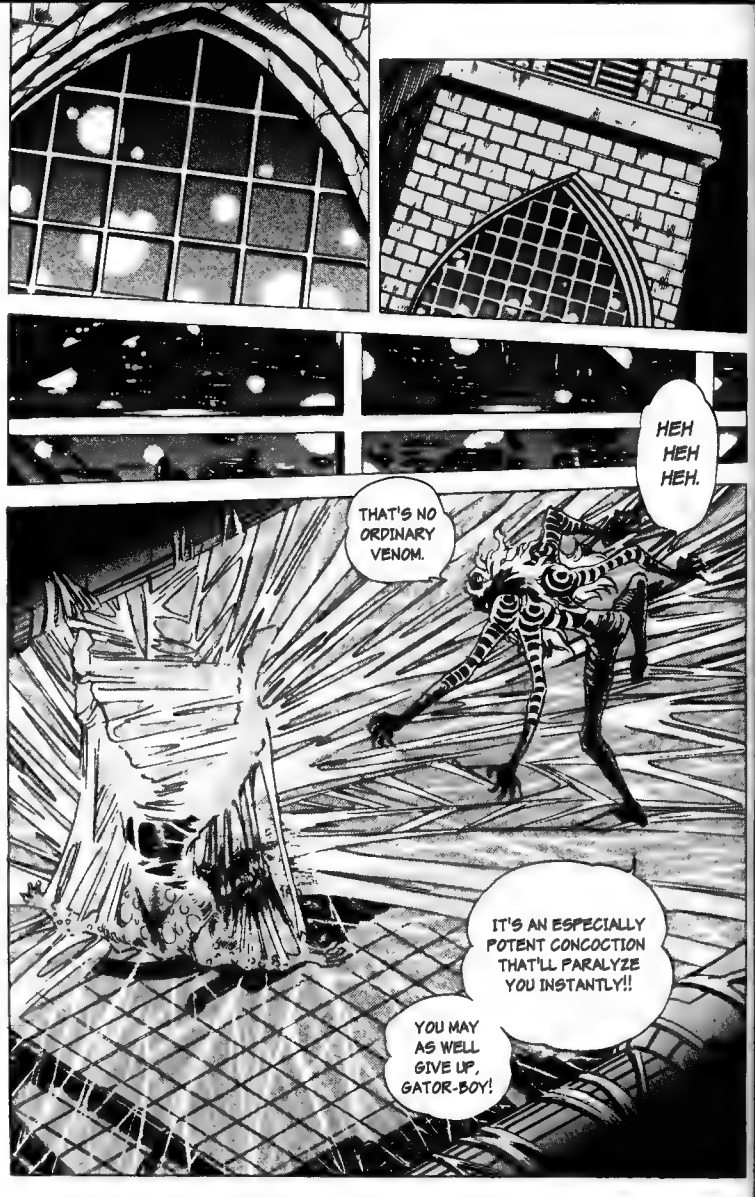
WHAT...
ARE...
YOU?

NO, NO!!
TOO LATE!


!!!

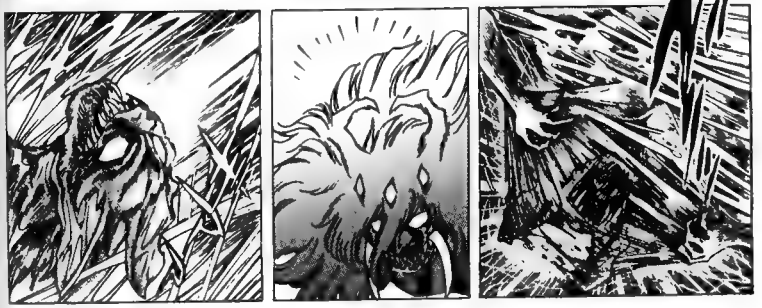
HEH HEH. THAT WAS TOO EASY.
I WISH I COULD SIT HERE AND TORTURE YOU SLOWLY, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE TIME.
YOU'RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO DIE HERE ALONE, GATOR-BOY.

インサイド・ストレンジャー（中編）
Vol.6
INSIDE STRANGER
-THE SECOND PART-

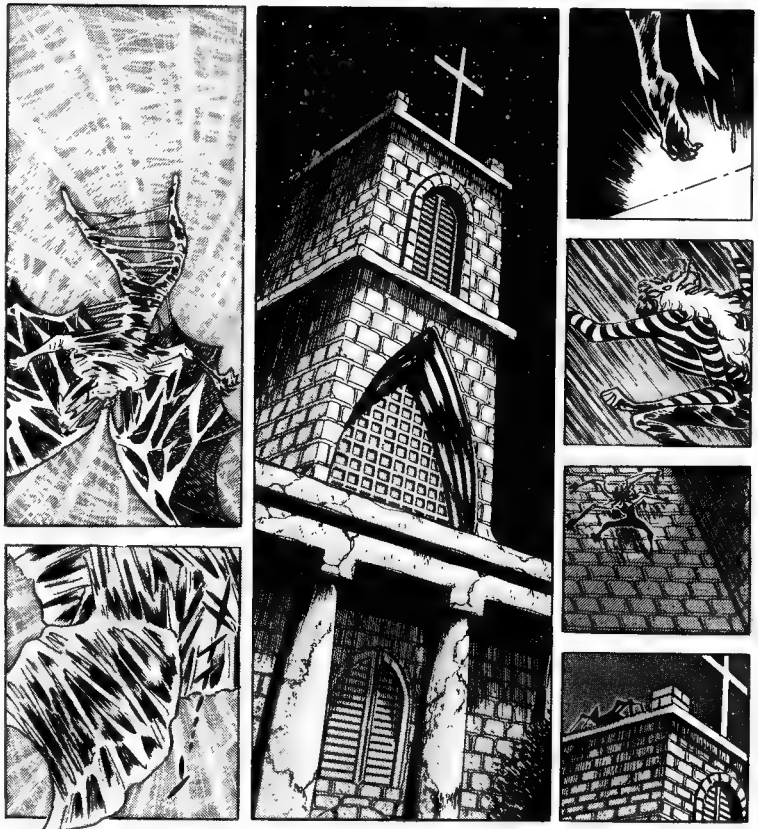

HEH HEH HEH.
THAT'S NO ORDINARY VENOM.
IT'S AN ESPECIALLY POTENT CONCOCTION THAT'LL PARALYZE YOU INSTANTLY!!
YOU MAY AS WELL GIVE UP, GATOR-BOY!

SWAAAAAH!!

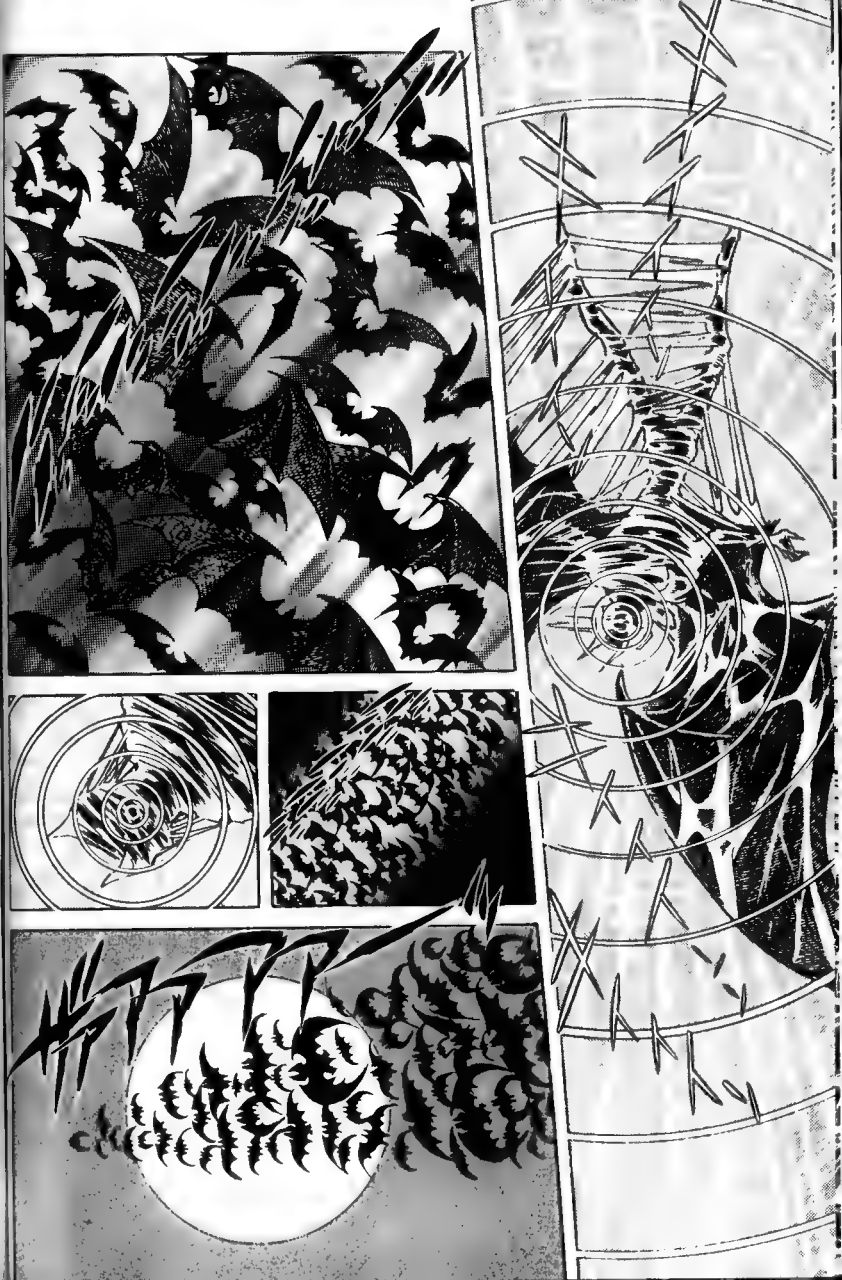
JESUS!
GGG..!
HOW MANY FORMS CAN YOU CHANGE INTO?

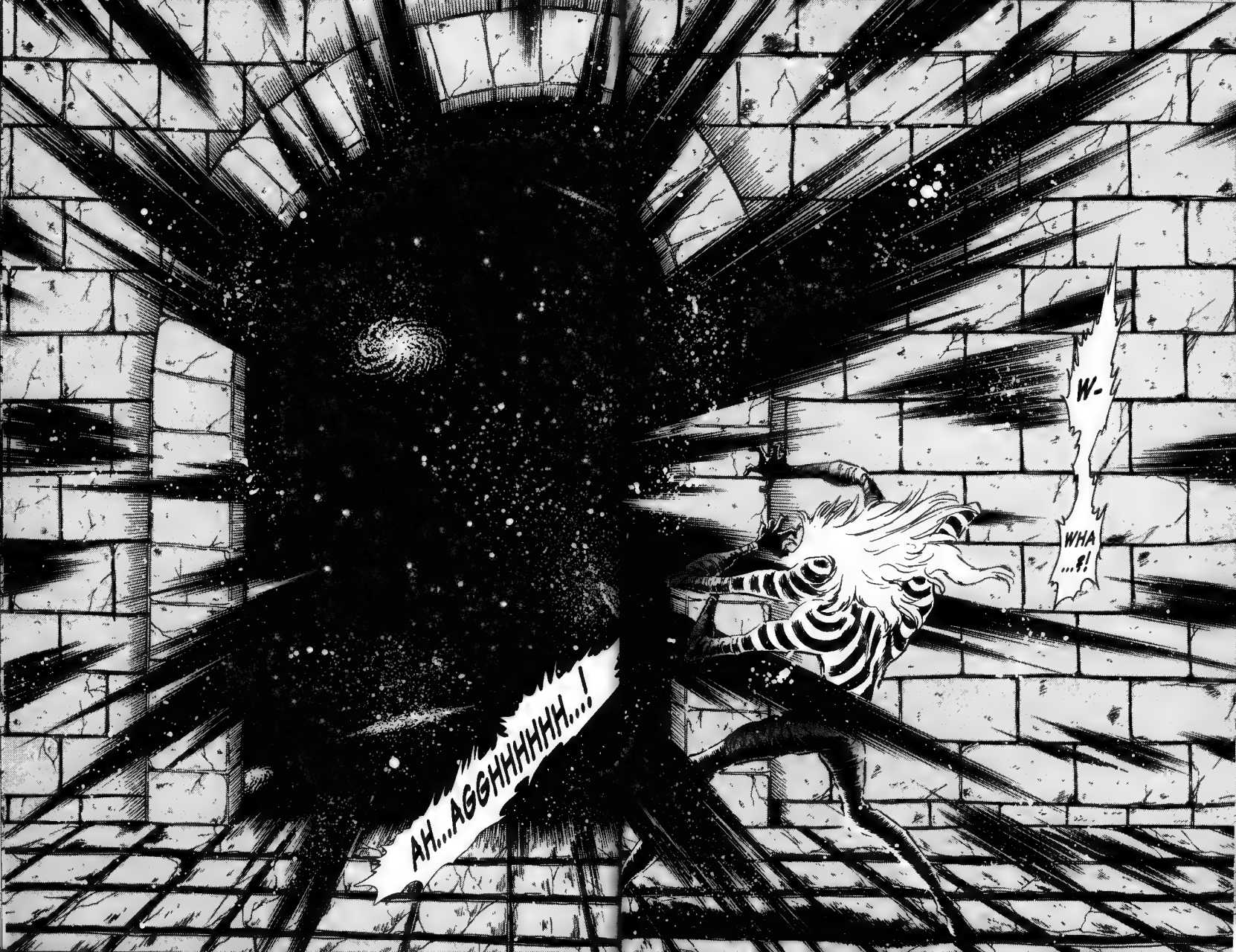


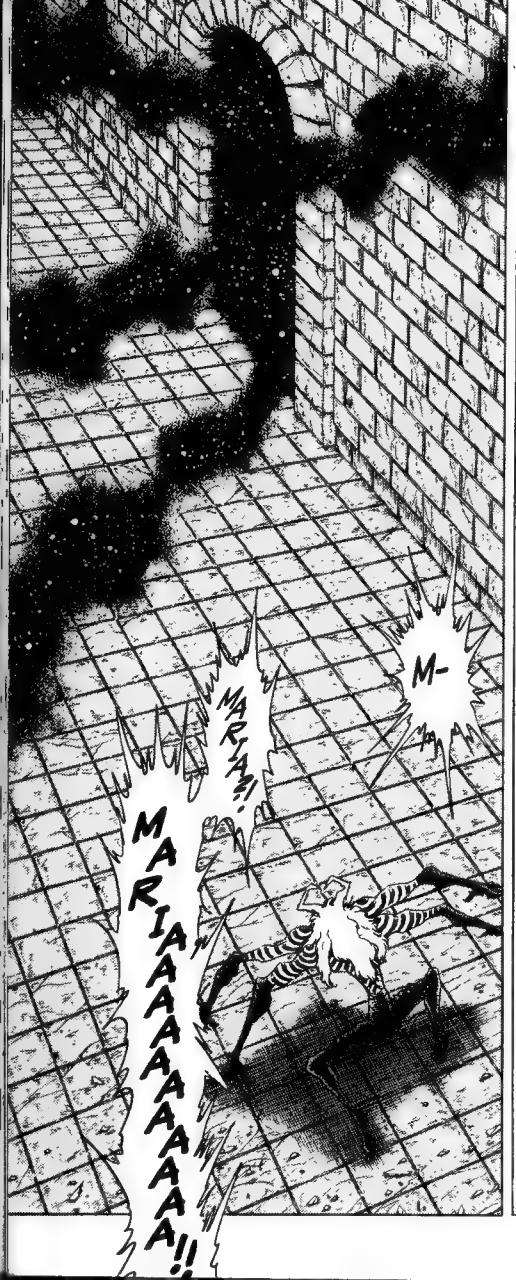
I WONDER HOW MARIA'S DOING?
WELL THEN,
IT LOOKS LIKE MY WORK HERE IS DONE.

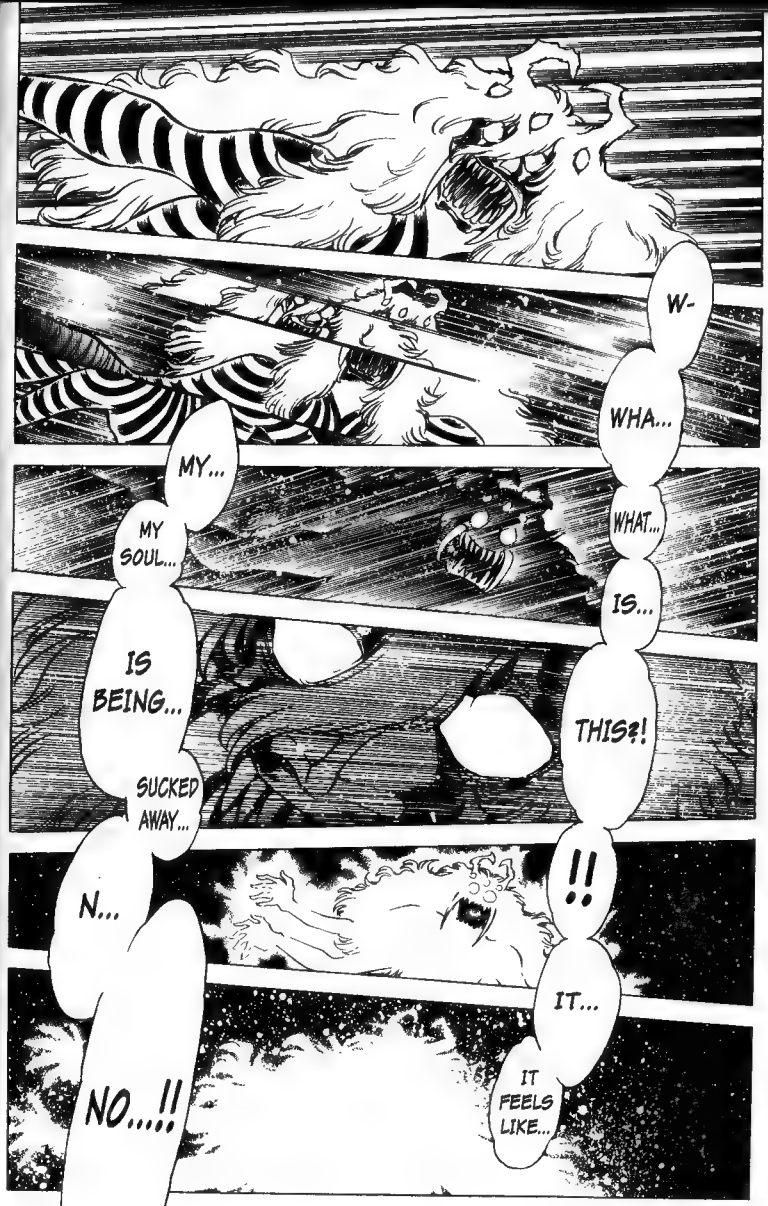


WHAT THE...!
WHAE!
GET OFF ME!
!!
EH...!
WHY DO I HAVE A BAD FEELING?
HMM?

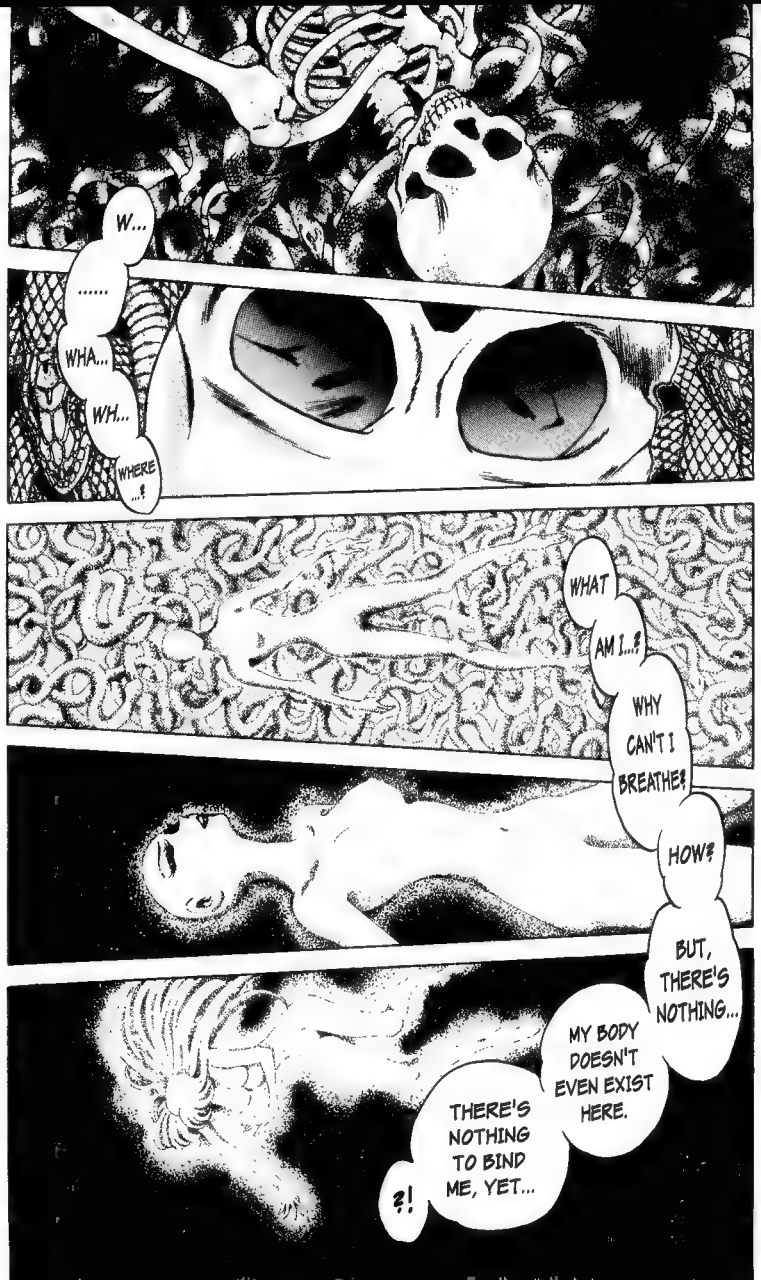


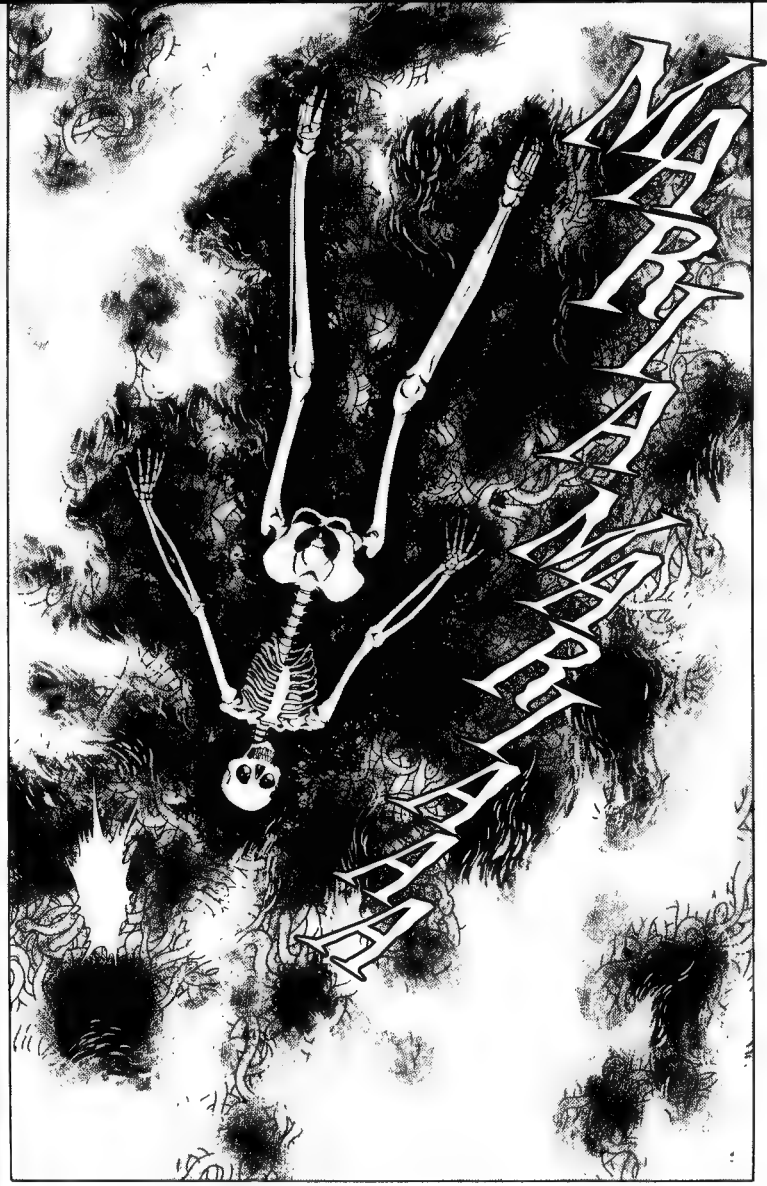

W-
WHA ...?!
AH...AGGHHHHHH...!


M-
MARIA!
MARIAAAAAAAAAA!!

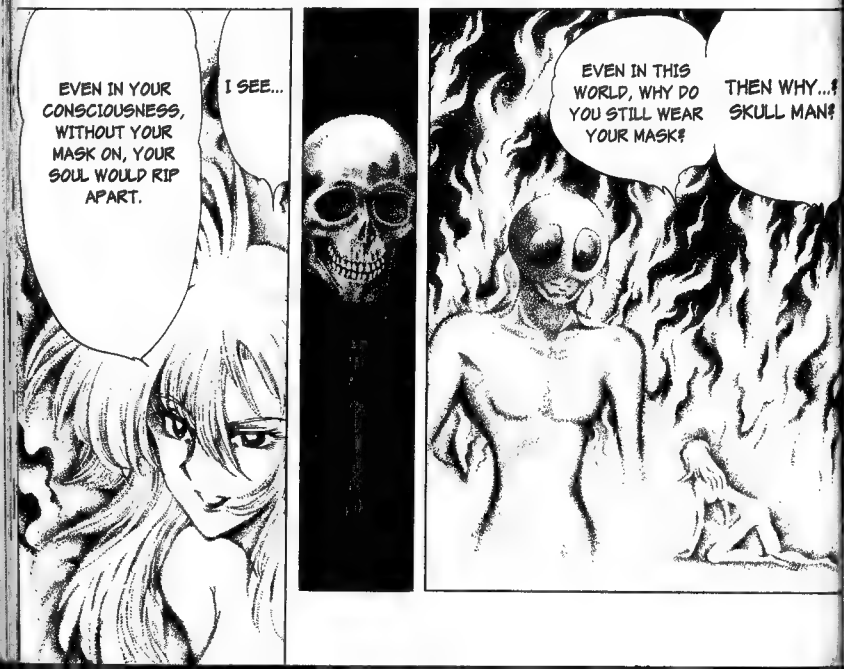

W-
WHA...
MY...
MY SOUL...
IS BEING...
SUCKED AWAY...
N...
NO...!!
WHAT...
IS...
THIS?!
!!
IT...
IT FEELS LIKE...

MARIA
MARIA
MARIA


W...
.....
WHA...
WH...
WHERE ...?
WHAT AM I...?
WHY CAN'T I BREATHE?
HOW?
BUT, THERE'S NOTHING...
MY BODY DOESN'T EVEN EXIST HERE.
THERE'S NOTHING TO BIND ME, YET...
?!


MARIAMARIAAAA

YOUR PRETTY LITTLE BODY IS ONLY A MANIFESTATION OF YOUR CONSCIOUNESS. IT DOENS'T REALLY EXIST.
THAT'S RIGHT.


EVEN IN YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS, WITHOUT YOUR MASK ON, YOUR SOUL WOULD RIP APART.
I SEE...
EVEN IN THIS WORLD, WHY DO YOU STILL WEAR YOUR MASK?
THEN WHY...? SKULL MAN?

HERE, YOU'RE STRIPPED OF EVERYTHING EXCEPT YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS. YOUR SOUL...

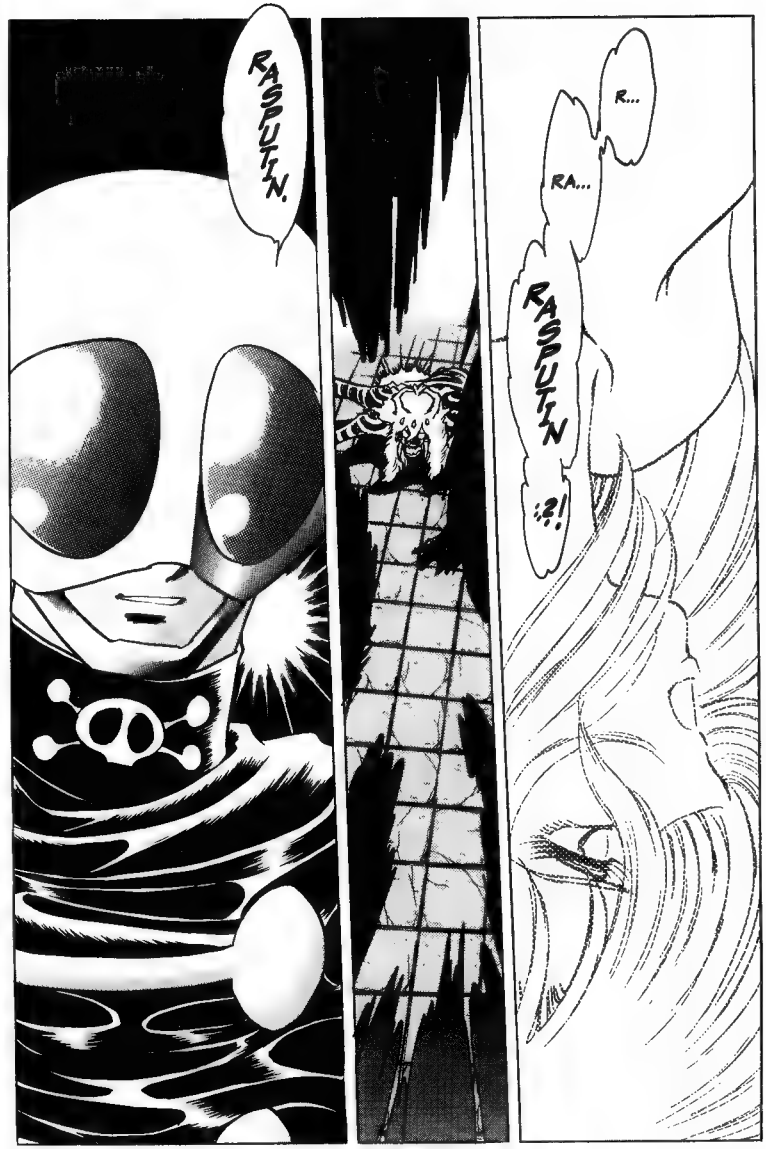
MARIA,
YOU'RE WRONG.
THIS IS NO MASK. THIS IS MY TRUE FACE.

...IF IT REALLY IS, FOR MYSELF!!
...LOOK AND SEE...
SO YOU SAY. BUT I WANT TO...

WHO AM I?!
Who am I?
Ha ha ha!
WHO AM I?!
WHO ARE YOU?!
I'M...
I...
I...

WHO'S GIVING YOU YOUR ORDERS?!
WHO IS HE?
TELL ME EVERY-THING!!
RELEASE YOURSELF
ANSWER ME, MARIA...
ANSWER ME...
WHO IS HE?! WHAT OES HE WANT?!
WHO IS HE?!
FOR WHAT URPOSE...
WHO IS YOUR MASTER?!
...DID HE RANT YOU...
WHO IS HE?!
ANSWER ME, MARIA!!
...YOUR POWERS, MARIA?
WHO?!
WHO IS HE?!
WHO IS HE?!

MARIA!! WAKE UP!!
NO... NOOO!!


R...
RA...
RASPUTIN...?!
RASPUTIN.

Vol. 7

インサイド・ストレンジャー（後編）

INSIDE STRANGER -THE LAST PART-

THE SKULL MAN

THE SKULL MAN

THE SKULL MAN

THE SKULL MAN

THE SKULL MAN

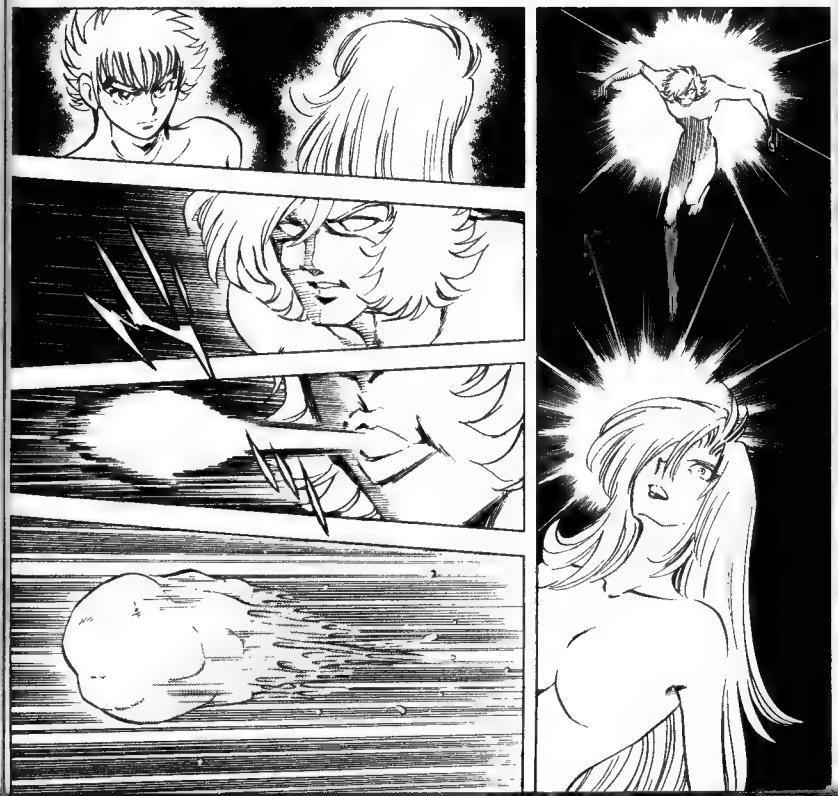
NRGH...
HA HA...
THAT'S RIGHT...
TH... THIS IS... MY TRUE...
FACE...

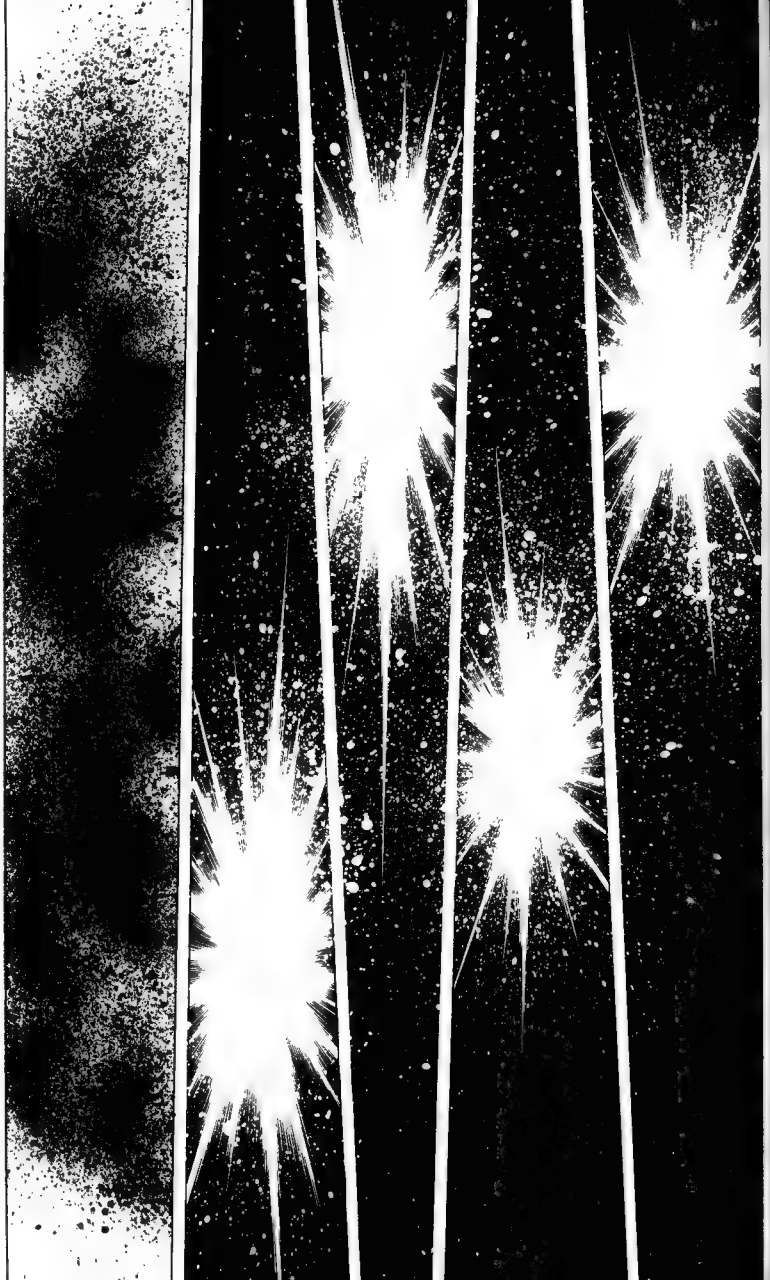
SHOW ME YOUR TRUE FACE!!

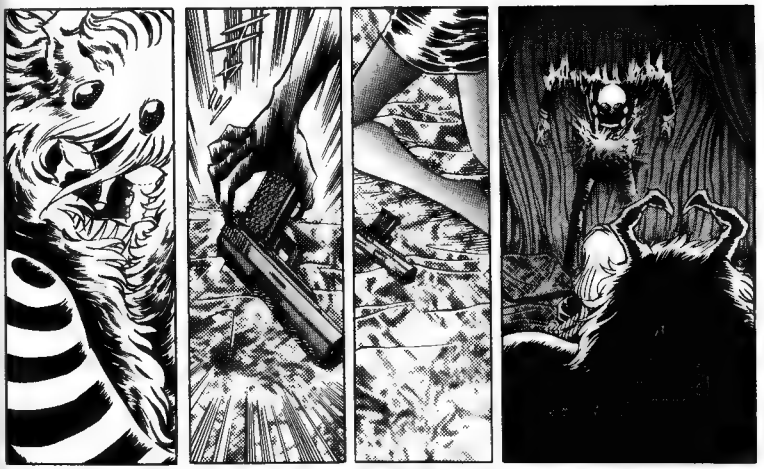
THE "FACE" YOU HAVE ON EARTH IS AN ILLUSION. HERE, YOUR TRUE FACE IS REVEALED.
THIS IS ALWAYS MY TRUE FACE... NO MATTER WHERE I AM.
BUT, YOU...
YOUR REAL FACE ISN'T SO BEAUTIFUL, MARIA...
YOU, WHO HAVE MURDERED AND DESTROYED SO MANY LIVES...

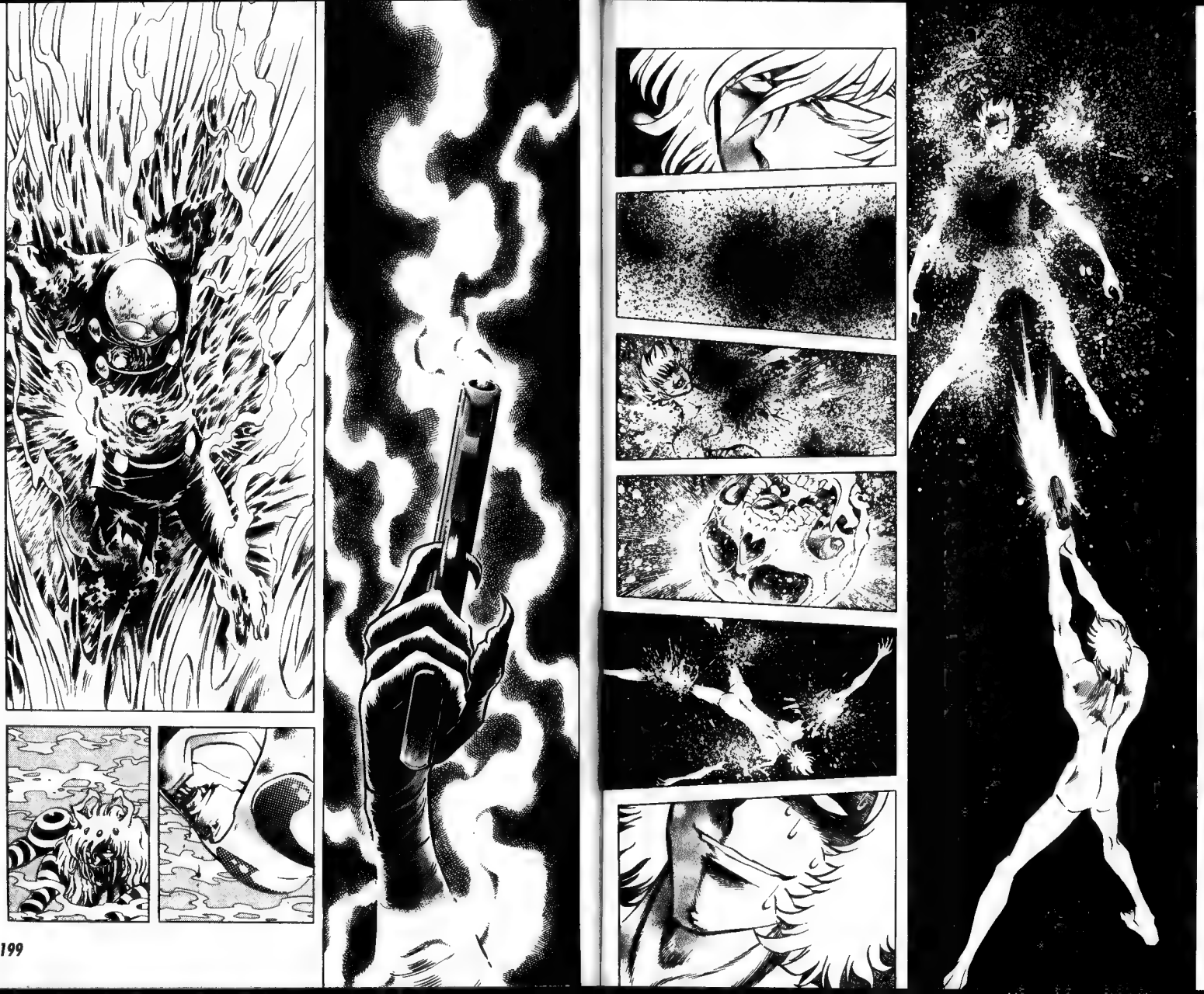
STOP IT!!
MARIA!!

NO...
NO!!





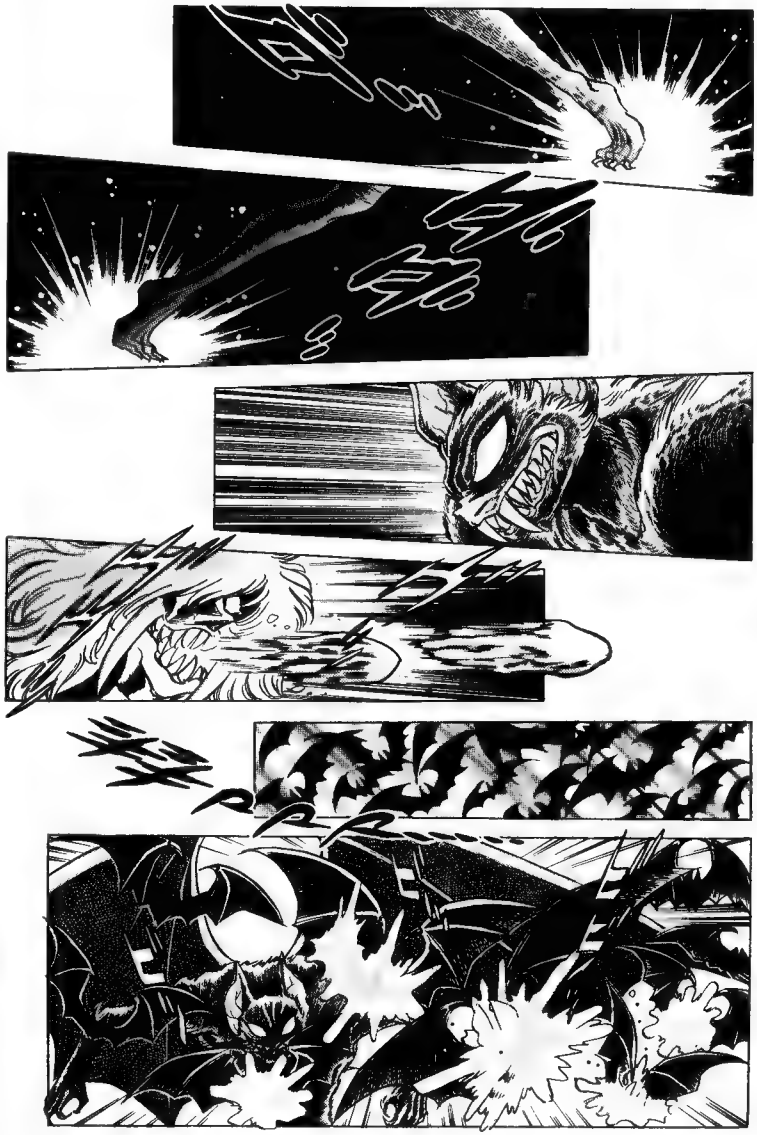




WHA?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
YOU FOOLS...
YOU DON'T REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE DOING.
IF YOU KILL ME...
THERE'LL BE NO ONE WHO CAN SAVE YOU.

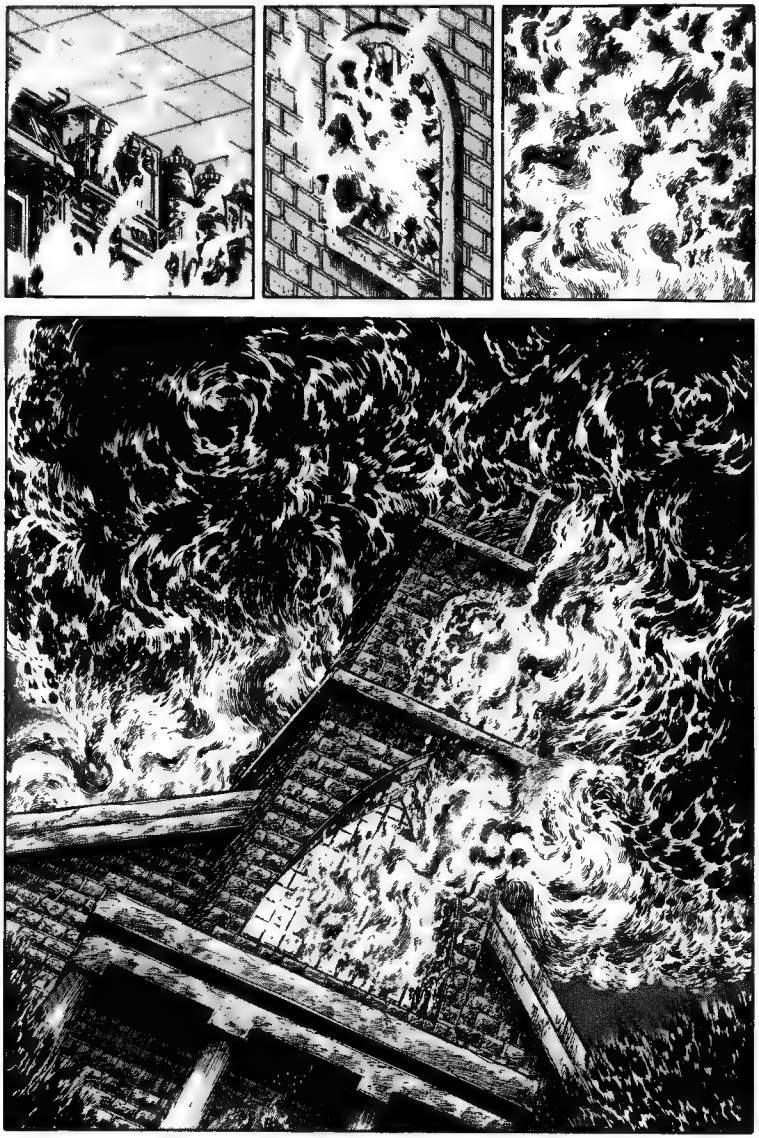
AH!
CONGRAT-ULATIONS. YOU MANAGED TO ESCAPE FROM MY WEB.
BUT WITH MY VENOM IN YOU, YOU CAN BARELY EVEN WALK.
SEE? I TOLD YOU.
HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO FIGHT ME?
COME ON, THEN. I'LL FINISH YOU OFF.
I'LL GIVE YOU THE FULL DOSAGE THIS TIME!!

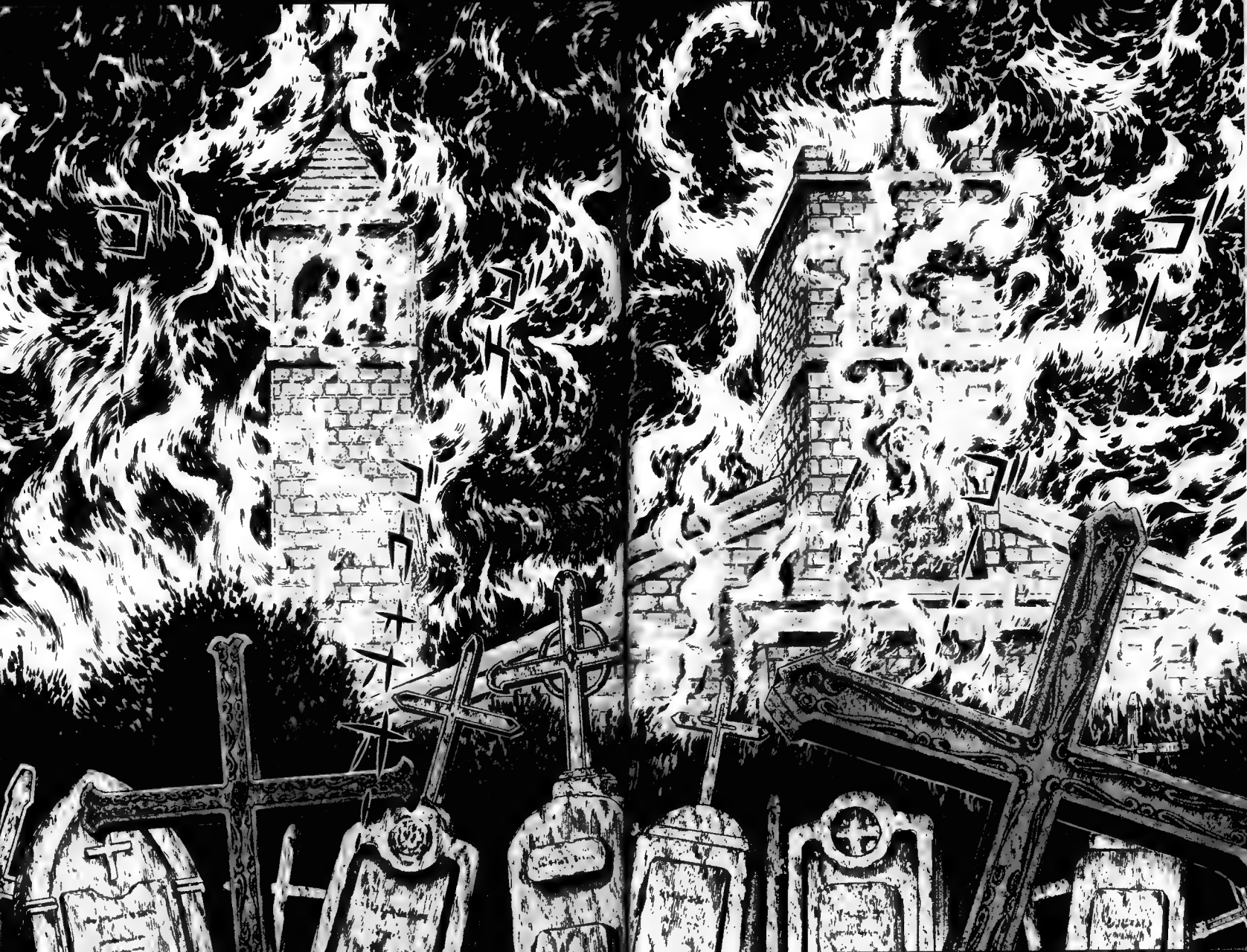
!!!
HE USED THEM TO HELP HIM ESCAPE FROM MY WEB!!
BATS?! SO, THAT'S HOW HE DID IT!!



I... HAVE TO...
SKULL MAN...
I HAVE TO... KILL YOU!!
D... DAMN ...
I'LL USE... ALL... OF MY... VENOM...!!

.....!!
ドドド





SKULL MAN 01 AFTERWORD

by Kazuhiko Shimamoto

"Mr. Ishinomori has announced plans to create a final chapter of *Cyborg 009*!" It was in the summer of 1997 that I first heard these monumental words, at the opening of the Shotaro Ishinomori Commemorative Center in Ishinomori City in Miyagi Prefecture. I had asked Mr. Ishinomori if I could take a look at some of his original drawings, and he invited me to his study that evening, where he informed me of his decision.

"And I'd like for you to collaborate on it with me." Of course, I agreed immediately. Or rather, I felt divinely compelled to join in this venture. My God, to be able to work on the follow-up to *009: The Angel Chapter*! This is a dream come true for any fan of the *009* manga series. The storyline had already been decided. In addition to this windfall, another tidbit bubbled to the surface. A staffer approached me: "Do you know about another work by Mr. Ishinomori, *The Skull Man*?" Of course I did. A precursor to *Masked Rider*, the protagonist was the absolute anti-hero. And then there were Alligator Man, Bat Man, Monkey Man - all of these famous characters from the *Kamen Rider* series had made their spectacular debuts in *Skull Man*.

The staffer continued. "The plans to revive *Skull Man* and the action figures are also already underway. The first edition figures will have a mini-comic attached as a bonus." "Splendid! I want one, too! I'll be there to buy them as soon as they hit the street!!" "It's already been confirmed that this project will be an original story by Mr. Ishinomori..." At times like these, I make it a habit not to assume that I'll have anything to do with the subject at hand. So, I simply thought that the project sounded great!! I can't wait to read it!

To be continued...

WHO IS THE SKULL MAN?

The book you are reading is a follow-up to Mr. Shotaro Ishinomori's *The Skull Man*, which first appeared in *Shonen Magazine* in 1970. *The Skull Man* was created as a three-part New Year's special mini-series. Its debut was marketed in newspaper ads and caused a sensation with over 1,502,000 books in print.

The hero, orphaned when his parents were murdered, used his peculiar powers to hunt down his enemies. Burning for vengeance, Tatsuo Kagura (Skull Man) relentlessly pursued his prey, who hid behind the curtains of politics and money. At times, his indiscriminately extreme methods resulted in casualties whose only sins were foolishness, or merely the bad luck to be in his way. After finally cornering the big boss, he was shocked to learn that the murderer of his parents was his own grandfather. And with him, he discovered a sister he had never known. After finally finding the truth that had always eluded him, the Skull Man, with his faithful sidekick Garo, was immolated in flames which also engulfed his enemies.

The original Skull Man was not a virtuous saint who fought for world peace, but a dark anti-hero who would even sacrifice innocents in his quest for revenge. This dark side is what makes *The Skull Man* so magnetic.

Shotaro Ishinomori created *The Skull Man* when he was 32 years old, and at the time he was the creator of *Cyborg 009: The Battle of the Gods*, published in *COM*, and *Sabu-to-Ichi-Torimono-Hikae*, published in *Big Comic*.

In the spring of 1971, he created the *Kamen Rider* series. *The Skull Man* is famous now for having been the inspiration for this legendary character.

SKULL MAN 01 AFTERWORD

by Kazuhiko Shimamoto

The conversation drifted to other topics, and the evening concluded. After a few days, I received a call from the staffer. "Mr. Ishinomori says that he would like to give you ***Skull Man***..." "Give?! What's he talking about?!"

"Well, in addition to the *009* project, he would like to know if you would like to do ***Skull Man*** as well."

"Of course!!" Are you kidding?! You don't even have to wait for me to think about it! "Then, I will send Mr. Ishinomori's story and plot notes by fax."

I read them. Incredible!! It was an absolutely fabulous story!! "So, am I actually being given the task of illustrating ***Skull Man*** and presenting it to the 110 million fans of Mr. Ishinomori's work?"

"Please discuss any further developments with Mr. Ishinomori..." So, I made a telephone appointment to discuss various questions and doubts about the plot, the villains, and other details. But, to tell you the truth, the more we talked, the more insecure I became.

"Feel free to do what you want," said Mr. Ishinomori. Free? Well, what does that mean? For one thing, I could never dare to draw something that was not worthy of Mr. Ishinomori, and draw the ire of his fans, as I was a fellow fan myself. But I am an experienced illustrator, and so I should have the necessary ability to properly judge a work of this nature... While I struggled with my demons, the deadline drew ever-closer...

Kick the book
wilson wilson